ESCAPE AND EVASION:

ALLIED AIRBORNE TROOPS BEHIND ENEMY LINES DURING OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

Peter van der Linden

OSPREY

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Allied airborne troops behind enemy lines during Operation *Market Garden*

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PUBLISHING

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FOREWORD

In September 1944 Operation *Market Garden* was conducted in the Netherlands. The objective of this operation was “to land a carpet of airborne troops” in the general areas of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem. The British Second Army was tasked to advance over this carpet and through these cities to the Zuiderzee, nowadays called the IJsselmeer. Next, Second Army was to make a right turn and charge into the German heartland and, hopefully, finish the war before Christmas. Regrettably, things would turn out very differently. As a result of Operation *Market Garden* only the southern part of the Netherlands was liberated in September and October 1944. The greater part of our country would have to wait for liberation until April and May of 1945.

In the vast range of publications regarding *Market Garden*, a lot of attention is given to the aspects of the planning and execution of this complex and hastily planned operation. Several authors have touched on the subject of the prematurely landed gliders and/ or downed aircraft. These are sometimes very detailed but often purely incidental.

In those September days of 1944 the province of Noord-Brabant found itself situated directly under the Allied aerial routes to and from the respective parachute drop-zones and glider landing-zones. It was inevitable that aircraft would be lost en route to their operational areas, occasionally a result of technical problems, but more often due to enemy anti-aircraft fire. It was therefore not surprising that many of these downed aircraft and their crews and passengers landed prematurely in the province of Noord-Brabant.

It is remarkable that a relatively large number of gliders made their forced landings in the area around Vught, and this was probably caused by the high number of German anti-aircraft guns in the area. Many of these downed aircrew and airborne troops were hidden from the Germans by the Dutch, and a large group of these so-called “evaders” were concentrated in a wooded area called the “Kampina.”

This book tells the story of the crews and passengers of these gliders and aircraft and their attempts to evade the Germans, their contact with the Dutch resistance movement, and the invaluable assistance received from the general population, the clergy, and the local resistance. Eventually 98 Kampina evaders managed to avoid capture and finally contacted their “own troops” of the British Second Army on October 25 in the village of Boxtel.

Peter van der Linden has produced a definitive account, reconstructing the evasion of the aircrew and airborne troops in the Kampina area and their Dutch helpers. With their help these Allied soldiers (British, American, one Dutchman, and one Pole) were kept from German captivity so that they could re-join their units. Peter is to be complimented on his achievement to document this important piece of history of operation *Market Garden*.

Arie-Jan van Hees,
Eijsden, August 30, 2012. Author of *Tugs and Gliders to Arnhem* and *Green On! The Story of Arnhem Re-supply*

PREFACE

As the son of Cees van Leeuwen, one of the resistance fighters in the Boxtel area, it's a great honour for me to be able to address the reader in a short preface. I was pleasantly surprised when Peter van der Linden asked me for this honorable job. In the period between September 17 and October 25, 1944, these resistance fighters from Boxtel kept a great number of American and British Airborne soldiers hidden from the German occupier and took care of them. The book describes in detail the events which took place in the surroundings of Boxtel and proved to be very important. It is very appealing that the writer focuses on those events, which until now were kept out of the spotlight.

The question arose "What would you do yourself in a situation like this?" A satisfying answer has still not been found. Not even by my father, who I posed this question to during the few conversations we had regarding this subject. He never once told me convincingly that he would do exactly the same again as he did during that period. He preferred not speak about the subject. As a matter of fact he really did not speak about this period of his life at all; he regarded the war as something in the past. In the conversations I had with him regarding this, his conclusion was the same every time: "It just happened to us. We did not have the opportunity to think it over. Everyone had a strong feeling of injustice about what happened during that period. We all felt we had to strike back. At least we wanted to help to bring this unbelievable situation to an end." On top of this, the strong feeling of "mein en dein," which suggests that what is yours is yours and what is mine is mine, and has been passed on from generation to generation, was absolutely being violated in those years of war.

In the very beginning, a consciously constructed resistance against the Germans was not apparent. It was something that grew in time; everybody did what he or she could and some of them gradually got more and more involved until the point of no return.

Nobody deliberately chose to play a specific role during those terrible war years; but luckily there are, in the hardest of situations, always people willing to make every effort, often risking their lives doing so, to fight injustices.

Of course my father (born 1918) had a certain feeling of pride afterwards, particularly when he told me about his experiences in the war years and being awarded the Medal of Freedom (USA) and the Kings Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom (UK). However, without even considering these acknowledgements as a possible consequence of his services, he always considered his efforts for the resistance as a normal thing to do: “It’s something you just do,” “Somebody needs to do it,” “You don’t ask for it and you are not going to pat yourself on the back afterwards.” Furthermore, my father always has taken the position that resistance was really only possible through the efforts of many. Fortunately there were in his direct surrounding several friends and associates who thought the same way he did. Amongst these was his future wife, my mother. Their work, in part, made it possible that such a large number of people (98) could have been accommodated safely in occupied territory, for a relatively long period of time.

It is without question to the credit of Peter van der Linden that this subject, which had receded into the background of history, has now received such a prominent description. For this I am very grateful, not only as a son, but also as an objective reader. The importance of standing up to injustice and with that selflessly standing up for your neighbor is being brought to light in an appealing way. Although I still have not found an answer to my question “What would you do yourself in a situation like this?” I can only imagine that certain people did what they felt they should and for that I have great admiration. And this book has most certainly contributed to that feeling.

Jan J. Van Leeuwen
Tilburg

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Since childhood I have developed a great interest in World War II affairs. I became thrilled by the stories of both my mother and grandmother of how they lived through those years of war in the town of Tilburg. They told me about their fear of the Germans billeted in the town and also of the Dutch people in their neighborhood that sided with the invaders. From occupation until liberation, all subjects came up, and out of these the liberation itself was the subject that fascinated me the most. That started me reading numerous books, watching movies and documentaries, visiting museums in the Netherlands and abroad, and travelling from the beaches of D-Day in Normandy to the battlefields of the Ardennes.

In 2007, while reading about the history of World War II in my present residence, the village of Oisterwijk, I ran into the story of a large group of Allied airborne troops who had been in hiding in the neighboring natural reserve of the Kampina. That event triggered my curiosity in such a way that I wanted to know everything there was to know about those hidden men. Since the book about the war in Oisterwijk provided only scant details, I started a long search for more information. From this it soon became apparent that these men were Allied soldiers from gliders that had made forced landings in the area, intended for Operation *Market Garden* in September 1944.

After having read a lot of books that, at times, went into great detail about this operation and the epic stand near Arnhem, I came to the conclusion that little information was available on this specific incident. Apart from a limited number of published and unpublished articles that related only to some of the units from within this group, no definitive account had been published.

It is a known historical fact that during Operation *Market Garden* British and American gliders with Allied servicemen on board landed prematurely in occupied territory, and that these men, occasionally, were assisted by ordinary civilians or the resistance, enabling them to go into hiding, or to rejoin their own troops. On the other hand, is it less well known that almost 100 Allied soldiers from three separate airborne divisions were in hiding behind the enemies’ frontline for more than five weeks. It is probably a unique fact that this force of evaders, assisted by local residents and the resistance, managed to clear a village ahead of the regular Allied army which arrived the following day.

Escape and Evasion relates to this considerable gathering of airborne troops; an assembly of troops mostly from the American 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions and the British 1st Airborne Division, all of them having landed prematurely on or after September 17 in North Brabant. Originally this considerable party existed as two distinct groups of men. One band, comprising 47 British and American airborne troops, came from gliders that had landed in the surrounding area of the nature reserve of the Loonse en Drunense duinen (Loonse and Drunense dunes). The other 51 consisted of American airborne troops that had landed in the vicinity of the nature reserve of the Kampina. Amongst this group were also some aircrew of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF).

While those landings took place between September 17 and 23, I have chosen to begin the story with the landings in the area around the Loonse en Drunense duinen. The story then continues with those that landed in the vicinity of the Kampina. This book also looks at how the individual units were assisted by the Dutch resistance from the time of their landing, guided to safe havens, and, finally, to be gathered in the Kampina at a later stage. It also describes these evaders' experiences during their stay behind enemy lines and exactly how they were helped.

After their landing, these two groups were assisted by different resistance groups, but weren't aware of each other's existence. During their stay behind the lines the troops, guided by their Dutch helpers, were constantly on the move because the risk of discovery by the Germans grew ever greater. Then, in late October, after more than five weeks of anxious wanderings, the groups came to know of each other's existence and decided to merge into a single force with their base in the Kampina, believing that a larger group would have more chance of success in joining the approaching Allied forces.

The merger of the two groups in the Kampina took place on October 21 and other Allied individuals soon joined the larger group. Some other Allied individuals followed closely in their trail. Also some Dutch civilians, who for different reasons were on the run from the Germans and in desperate need of a hiding place, found safety amongst these military men and all stayed together for a number of days. During this last period of hiding in the Kampina, ten Germans were taken prisoner in the surrounding area and kept as prisoners of war amongst the airborne troops in their camp.

Finally, on the evening of October 24, after hearing reports that indicated that the German occupiers had withdrawn from the Boxtel area and having identified British infantry to the east of the village, the entire group decided to abandon its camp and march into the nearby town of Boxtel.

Upon arrival in Boxtel the airborne evaders and their Dutch allies, still with the German prisoners under their control, were greeted as liberators. Although effectively freed that night, for its official liberation Boxtel had to wait until the following morning when the British 51st Highland Division marched in.

After a morning and afternoon of celebration and festivities with Boxtel’s population, the airborne troops gathered outside the village. In the ensuing days all were transported to Belgium and from there to England to rejoin their units and to be reunited with their comrades.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND MILITARY TERMS

2/Lt	Second Lieutenant
Bailey bridge	a bridge that consists of standard pre-fabricated elements of steel with a wood planking roadbed that can be assembled quickly. Developed in 1940 by D.C. Bailey
Bn	Battalion
Bren gun	a light fully automatic British gun
Bren Carrier	a light armored tracked vehicle
Bridgehead	an occupied area on the other side of a natural obstacle from where the attacking force intends to commence his advance
C-47 Skytrain	freight version of the DC-3
Capt	Captain
CCCD	Central Crisis Control Department
Chalk number	a number written in chalk on the side of an aircraft to indicate its number in the overall operation plan/flight schedule
CN	Chalk Number
Co	Company
Comm Sect	Communication Section
Consi cigarettes	the name given to the substitute cigarettes made during World War II
Cpl	Corporal
Dvr	Driver
field grave	a soldiers first burial location, normally where he fell
F/O	Flight Officer
Fliegerhorst	the name for a German military airfield
GFAB	Glider Field Artillery Battalion
GIR	Glider Infantry Regiment

Gnr	Gunner
GPR	Glider Pilot Regiment
HQ	Headquarters
Initial Point	a local or unmistakable geographical feature that allowed the air crews to correctly navigate their way to the drop or landing zones
L/Bdr	Lance Bombardier
L/Cpl	Lance Corporal
LSW	Luftschutz Warndienst, the Wehrmacht and Air Protection Warning Service
Lt	Lieutenant
Marechaussee	Dutch Royal Military Police
Med Sect	Medical Section
NSB	Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging. The National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands was a Dutch Fascist and later National Socialist political party. It was the only legal party in the Netherlands during most of World War II.
NSKK	Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps. The German National Socialist Motor Corps was a paramilitary organization of the Nazi Party that existed from 1931 to 1945. The NSKK provided training for Panzer crews of the German Army, was responsible for the training of drivers for the army, assisted in traffic control, and provided transports for the armed forces. The NSKK included numerous French, Dutch, and Belgian volunteers.
Polder	Low-lying tract of land enclosed by embankments (barriers) known as dikes that forms an artificial hydrological entity.
PIAT	Projector Infantry Anti Tank; a British antitank weapon used by the infantry
Pfc	Private first class
Pte	Private
RAF	Royal Air Force
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RVV	Raad van Verzet, Council of Resistance

S/Sgt	Staff Sergeant
Sgt	Sergeant
Sqdn	Squadron
T/Sgt	Technical Sergeant
T/4	Technician fourth class
T/5	Technician fifth class
TAF	Tactical Air Force
TCG	Troop Carrier Group
TCS	Troop Carrier Squadron
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
Wehrmacht	The armed forces of Germany’s Third Reich
WVA	Wehrmacht Verpflegungs Amt; German armed forces medical supply depot

INTRODUCTION: OPERATION *MARKET GARDEN*

After the Allied forces broke through the Atlantic Wall in June 1944 and established a strong foothold in Normandy, they managed to reach the outskirts of the French capital of Paris by the end of August. The German general and the military governor of the city, Dietrich von Choltitz, had been instructed by the Führer, Adolf Hitler, to defend the capital at all costs, or to destroy it.

The 2nd French Armored division, under the command of General Leclerc, had been instructed by the Allied Command to take control of the city and liberate Paris. This armored division was part the Free French Forces under command of Gen Charles de Gaulle, which was in turn part of the Allied forces that participated in the march through France.

Heavy fighting followed in Paris, and continued until Dietrich von Choltitz surrendered the city on August 25, having refused to obey Hitler’s orders to turn the city into ruins. After the surrender of Paris the Allies advanced progressively into France, liberating the country, with the exception of a few cities, by the beginning of September. The Allied advance continued into through Belgium and the capital, Brussels, was liberated on September 3. The port city of Antwerp fell intact into Allied hands one day later and the Allies were soon along the Albert Canal near the Dutch border. Behind this canal, the Germans had established a line of defence, raised from the remnants of the defeated armies streaming back from France, and reinforced with troops hastily brought in from Germany and Holland. Deploying bridgeheads on September 6 the Allies continued their progress towards the Dutch border enduring heavy German resistance.

Fighting fiercely against the German troops, the British reached the Maas-Schelde Canal on September 10, where they established a bridgehead at the town of Neerpelt. Due to the tough German defence and Allied supply problems caused by the rapid advance through France and Belgium, the Allies were brought to a momentary halt, before creating a new front line along the Maas-Schelde Canal. The British commander Field Marshal

Bernard Montgomery then came up with a daring plan to try to put an end to the war by Christmas 1944. By a swift move from Belgium through Holland he intended to advance into the industrial heartland of Germany, the Ruhr region. After the conquest of this area, Montgomery would move ahead through the North German plains up to the German capital of Berlin. This operation was named *Market Garden*.

More specifically the *Market Garden* plan was as follows: airborne forces would be flown from England to mount a surprise attack in order to capture the bridges across the Dutch rivers and waterways between Eindhoven and Arnhem. Simultaneously Field Marshal Montgomery wanted to establish a narrow corridor from the bridgehead at the Maas-Schelde Canal along which the British Army Corps, XXX Corps could advance towards the Zuiderzee (Ijsselmeer) in Holland. However, after having crossed the Nederrijn River at Arnhem, XXX Corps would turn to the right in the direction of the German Ruhr region. After that, the Allies would push through to Berlin in order to conquer the city and end the war by the end of 1944.

Codename *Market*

Market Garden consisted of two parts: an airborne operation and a ground offensive. *Market* was the codename for the airborne operation and *Garden* for the ground offensive. Two American and one British airborne division were to take part in operation *Market*, launching from bases in England. These divisions were part of the First Allied Airborne Army under the command of the American, LtGen Lewis H. Brereton.

On August 2, 1944, the First Allied Airborne Army had been formed in England under orders from General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allied forces. First Allied Airborne Army controlled all Allied airborne forces in Western Europe between August 1944 and May 1945. This Army included the US XVIII Airborne Corps with the US 82nd Airborne Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 17th Airborne Division, and a number of independent airborne units. It also included the British 1st and 6th Airborne Divisions.

Furthermore, the US IX Troop Carrier Command also came under the First Allied Airborne Army. This was a unit of the USAAF that maintained the air transport for the airborne divisions with transport, tug, and glider aircraft. The Royal Air Force (RAF) also provided transport and tug aircraft while the British Glider Pilot Regiment was responsible for providing the crews for the

British military gliders.

ALLIED
AIRBORNE
1

Patch First Allied Airborne Army.

AIRBORNE
TROOP CARRIER

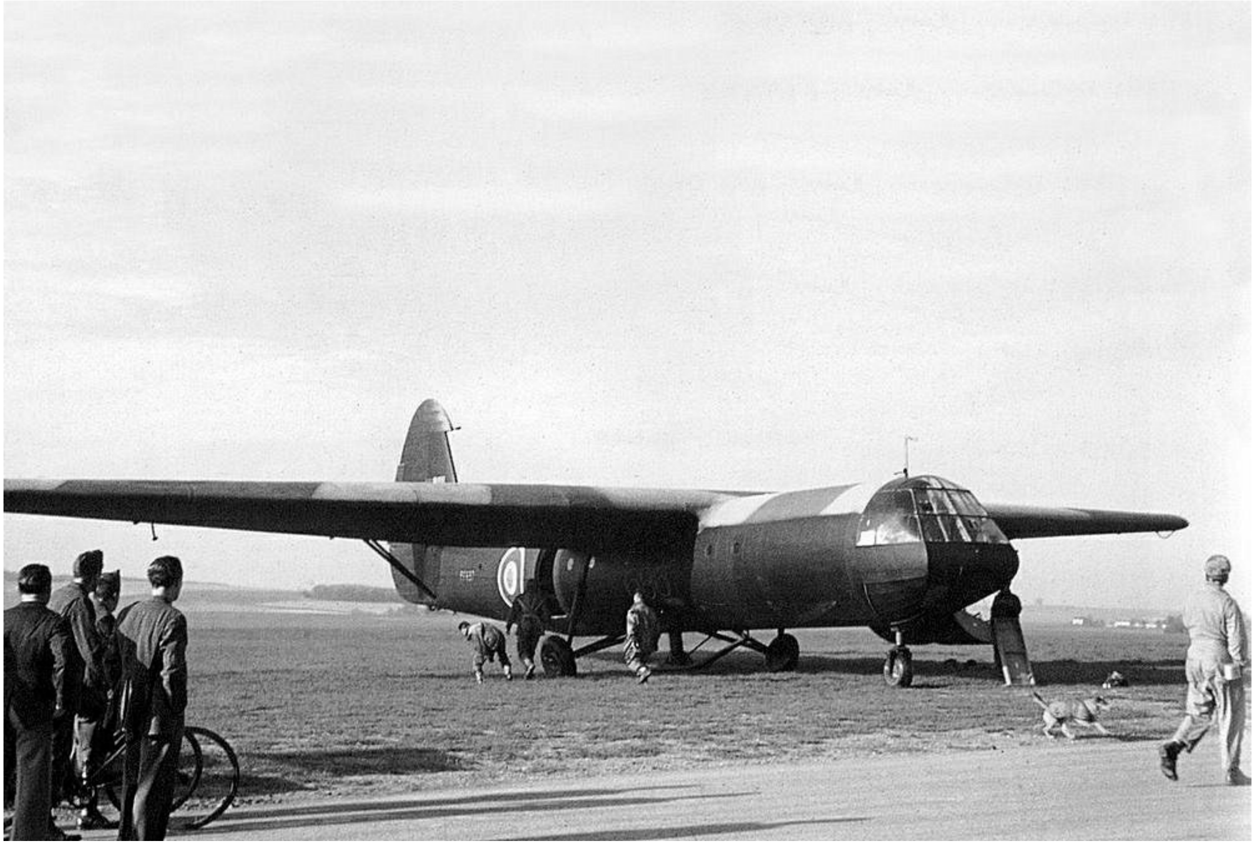
Patch IX Troop Carrier Command.

Cap badge Glider Pilot Regiment.

The American and British airborne divisions consisted of paratroops that were dropped by parachute while glider borne troops were carried in by glider together with their support equipment; both were referred to as airborne troops. The paratroops were utilised because they could be dropped close to their target. A disadvantage was that during the drop they became spread over an area and once on the ground, they had to assemble and collect their equipment before they could engage in battle. On the contrary, the gliders had the advantage that the unit arrived on the ground as composite bodies of men and consequently needed less time to assemble. Moreover, these gliders could bring in equipment, such as armaments, light artillery, and transport together with the men.

The American airborne divisions for *Market* consisted of the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions. The 101st would be dropped near Eindhoven and the 82nd close to Nijmegen. The British 1st Airborne Division, supported by the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade, would be dropped at Arnhem. The air transports for the operation would take place between September 17 and 25.

The parachute drop-zones and glider landing-zones for *Market* were located near the towns of Son and Veghel for the 101st Airborne Division at Eindhoven, near Overasselt, Groesbeek, and Grave for the 82nd at Nijmegen and near Wolfheze, and Ede and Oosterbeek for the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem. The plan was that the gliders would be cast off above the landing-zones and land quickly after a rapid descent by diving steeply towards the ground. After the gliders had landed, the formations of transport aircraft would follow to drop their parachutists on their designated drop-zones.



The British troop-carrying glider, the Airspeed Horsa. This glider was constructed out of wood and could be used for transporting up to 25 troops including their arms and equipment. Due to its size the aircraft could carry a larger load than its American counterpart, the CG-4A Waco. For example, a Horsa glider could carry two Jeeps at a time, or just one Jeep and a trailer or a small gun (6pdr antitank gun or 75mm howitzer). The crew of the Horsa consisted of a pilot and co-pilot. (G.

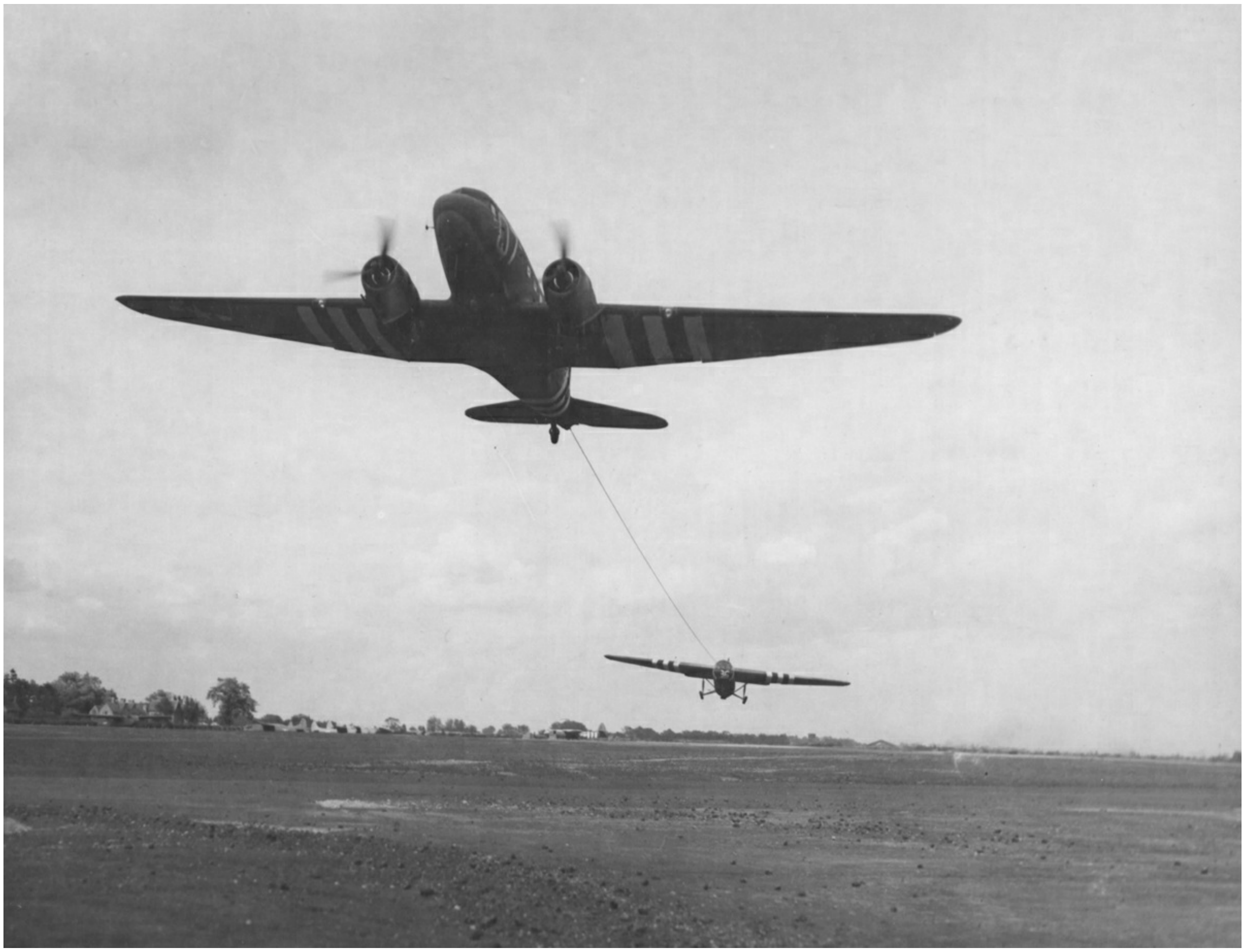
Segers)

The American CG-4A Waco transport glider. The aircraft was constructed of fabric-covered wood and metal and could carry 13 troops including their equipment. The glider was also capable of carrying a Jeep and four passengers or a small gun or trailer. The crew of the Waco glider was a pilot and a co-pilot. (NARA)

Over the course of nine days, Operation *Market* nearly 5,000 transport aircraft would be deployed in addition to more than 2,000 troop carrying gliders. Over 20,000 paratroops were to be flown in and dropped, and more than 13,500 troops were to be flown in by glider. In addition, a large number of fighters would accompany the transport for protection. The transport aircraft would depart from various airports in Southern England to form up and join the main column at predetermined points above England. From there two different routes were mapped out to Holland, one to the south and one to the north.

The southern route ran from England via the North Sea to the Belgian coastal resort of Ostend. From Ostend the route continued over the liberated part of Belgium to an Initial Point (Way Point) near the Belgian towns of Geel and Leopoldsburg. (The Initial Point was a geographical or unmistakable feature that allowed the aircrews to recognize where they were in relation to the drop or landing zones.) From this Initial Point onwards the transport fleet would have to cross the Dutch border and fly over occupied territory to the drop and landing-zones near Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem.

The northern route ran from England across the North Sea directly to Holland from where it ran in its entirety across occupied territory. From crossing the Dutch coast at Schouwen-Duiveland the fleet crossed the province of North Brabant to its Initial Point near the village of Vught, south of North Brabant’s provincial capital ’s-Hertogenbosch. From this Initial Point the pilots altered course to their respective destinations.



A Horsa glider being towed into the air from an airstrip. (NARA)

X
315661
U5
F
U5
L

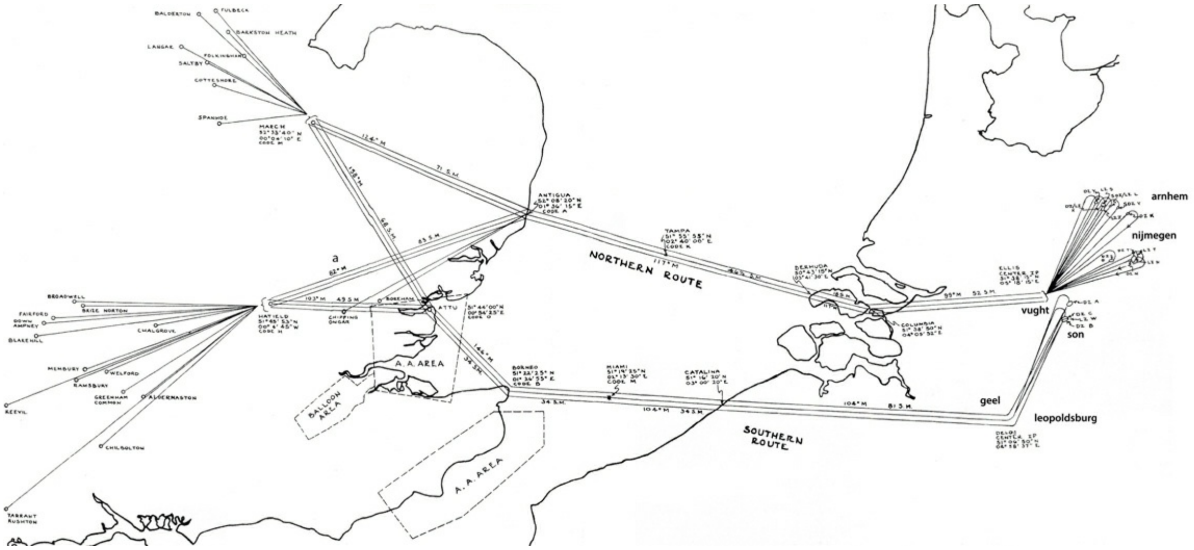
American Douglas C-47 Skytrain transport aircraft; the British called this aircraft the Dakota. (G. Segers)

A CG-4A Waco glider being towed by a C-47 Skytrain. (G. Segers)

Thus, Operation *Market Garden* commenced on Sunday September 17, 1944. During the preceding night and the early morning more than 1,500 bombers and fighters of the RAF, the British 2nd Tactical Air Force (TAF), and the US 8th Air Force took off to attack and bomb various targets in Holland in preparation of the forthcoming landings. After that, the large air fleet departed from their airfields in England. This first fleet consisted of over 1,500 transport aircraft and nearly 500 gliders carrying the airborne troops to the drop and landing-zones; it was escorted by more than 1,500 fighters to protect it against possible enemy attack. These Allied fighters also had to clear the route over Holland of German anti-aircraft guns and batteries.

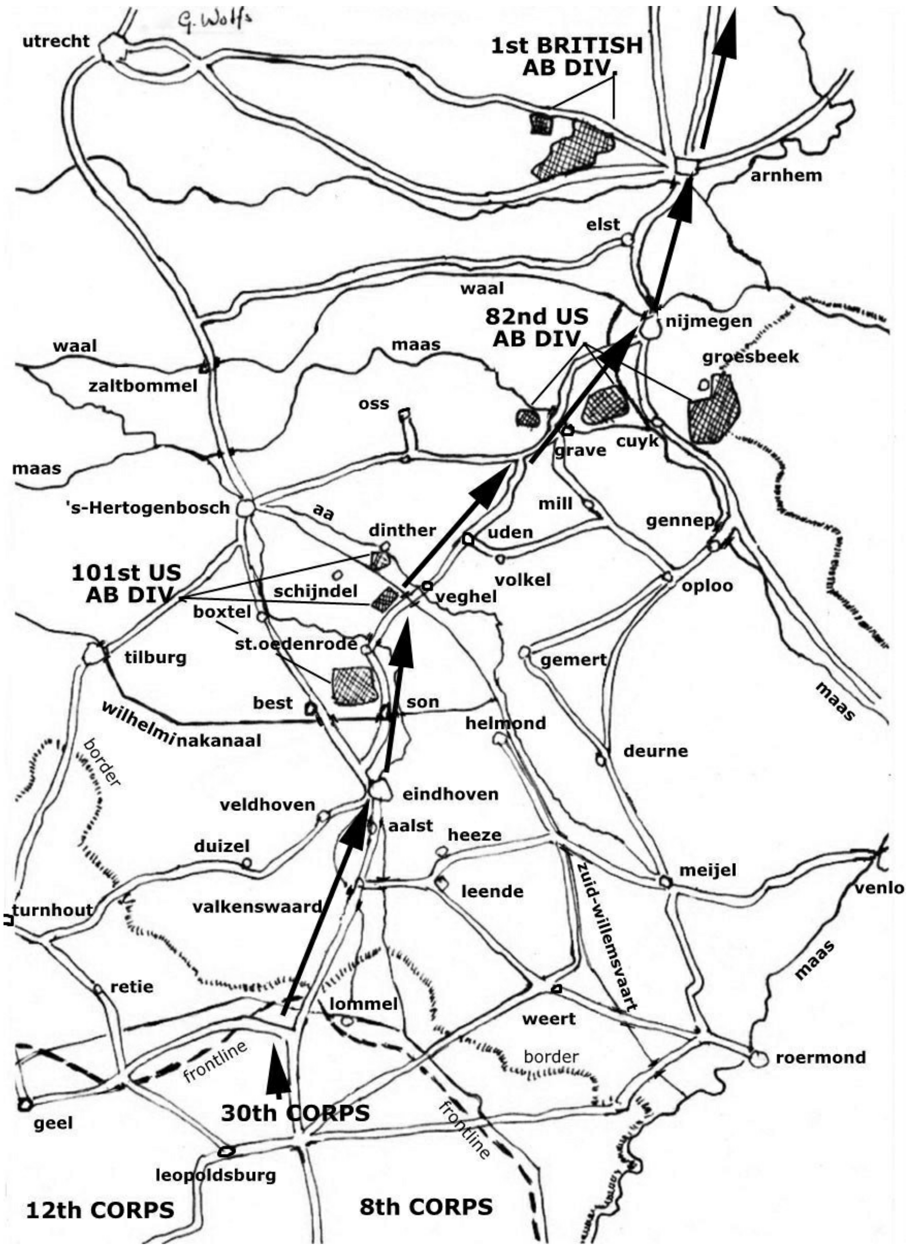
From the start, the transport fleet was divided into two formations that followed the two separate routes across the North Sea. The formation flying by the northern route to Holland consisted of the American 82nd and British 1st Airborne Divisions, meanwhile the 101st would fly to its target in Holland by the southern route. The ground offensive of British XXX Corps, Operation *Garden*, was scheduled to start at the same time as this fleet crossed the front line near the Maas-Schelde Canal in Belgium.

The stage was set.


BALDERTON
FULBECK
BARKSTON HEATH
LANGAR
FOLKINGHAM
SALTBY
COTTESMORE
SPANHOE
MARCH
52° 33' 40" N
00° 04' 10" E
CODE M
124° M
71 S.M.
138° M
68 S.M.
ANTIGUA
52° 08' 20" N
01° 34' 15" E
CODE A
63 S.M.
a
82° M
BROADWELL
BRIZE NORTON
FAIRFORD
DOWN AMPNEY
BLAKEHILL
CHALGROVE
MEMBURY
WELFORD
RAMSBURY
GREENHAM COMMON
ALDERMASTON
KEEVIL
CHILBOLTON
TARRANT RUSHTON
HATFIELD
51° 45' 53" N
00° 4' 45" W
CODE H
103° M
49 S.M.
BOREHAM
CHIPPING ONGAR
ATTU
51° 44' 00" N
00° 54' 25" E
CODE O
A. A. AREA
BALLOON AREA
146° M
34 S.M.
BORNEO
51° 22' 25" N
01° 34' 55" E
CODE B
A. A. AREA
TAMPA
51° 55' 55" N
02° 40' 00" E
CODE K
NORTHERN ROUTE
117° M
BERMUDA
ELLIS
CENTER, IP
COLUMBIA
99° M
52 S.M.
arnhem
nijmegen
vught
son
MIAMI
51° 19' 25" N
02° 13' 30" E
CODE M
CATALINA
51° 16' 20" N
03° 00' 20" E
34 S.M.
104° M
34 S.M.
104° M
81 S.M.
SOUTHERN ROUTE
geel
leopoldsburg
DELOS
CENTER, IP

Navigation diagram for the transport fleet for Operation *Market Garden*.
Airfields:
1. Broadwell
2. Brize Norton
3. Fairford
4. Down Ampney
5. Blakehill
6. Chalgrove
7. Membury
8. Welford
9. Ramsbury
10. Keevil
11. Greenham Common
12. Aldermaston
13. Chilbolton
14. Tarrant Rushton
15. Balderton
16. Fulbeck

17. Barkston Heath
18. Langar
19. Folkingham
20. Saltby
21. Cottesmore
22. Spanhoe
23. Boreham
24. Chipping Ongar


G. Wolfs
utrecht
1st BRITISH AB DIV.
arnhem
elst
waal
82nd US AB DIV
nijmegen
groesbeek
waal
maas
zaltbommel
oss
maas
grave
cuyk
's-Hertogenbosch
aa
mill
gennep
dinther
uden
101st US AB DIV
schijndel
volkel
veghel
oploo
boxtel
st.oedenrode
tilburg
gemert
maas
best
son
wilhelminakanaal
helmond
deurne
border
eindhoven
veldhoven
aalst
heeze
duizel
meijel
venlo
leende
turnhout
valkenswaard
zuid-willemsvaart
maas
retie
lommel
weert
roermond
border
frontline
30th CORPS
geel
frontline
leopoldsburg
12th CORPS
8th CORPS

Plan for Operation *Market Garden*.

Chapter 1

ENVIRONS TO THE SOUTH OF ’S-HERTOGENBOSCH

The Loonse en Drunense duinen and the Kampina

When the gliders and carrier aircraft were forced to crash or land early, a number of airborne troops found themselves dropped short of their targets and in unfamiliar territory. Whether dropped individually or in small groups, they were assisted by the local Resistance network in the area of the Loonse en Drunense dunient and the vicinity of Vught and Boxtel.

The nature reserve of the Loonse en Drunense duinen is located in the province of North Brabant, about 9 miles (15km) to the west of the provincial capital ’s-Hertogenbosch and 6 miles (10km) northeast of the city of Tilburg. The area is about 8,500 acres in size and consists of sand dunes, woods, and moorland, and is surrounded by pastures, hamlets, and villages and was sparsely populated at the time of World War II.

To the south side of the Loonse en Drunense duinen, from east to west, are the villages of Helvoirt with the hamlet of Hoef ten Halve, the villages of Biezenmortel and Udenhout with the hamlet Zandkant, and the village Loon op Zand. On the short, southern side of the area is the village of Kaatsheuvel, while bordering the northern side is the Afwaterings Canal, a drainage canal that runs from ’s-Hertogenbosch in the direction of Drunen, discharging into the River Maas at the village of Drongelen. Also to the north of the Loonse en Drunense duinen lies the city of Waalwijk and the villages of Drunen and Nieuwkuijk, plus a number of small settlements and hamlets such as Fellenoord and Giersbergen.

Between 1942 and 1944, the Germans had an ammunition depot in the western part of the Loonse en Drunense duinen which they called MASt (Munitions Ausgabe Stelle). It was about 185 acres in size and in use as a distribution point for the German Luftwaffe. The MASt supplied the Luftwaffe airfield near Gilze Rijen. On what became known as “Mad Tuesday,” September 5, 1944, the Germans panicked amidst rumours that the

Allies had already advanced to the Dutch border and were at the point of liberating the country. This rumour led them to blow up part of the MASt that morning. The force of the explosion was so severe that a large number of windows were blown out of frames within a radius of 6 miles (10km).

Twelve days later, on September 17, the large air armada of Allied aircraft flying from the west over the area triggered the Germans to blow up the remainder of the storage depot. The explosions were much stronger than those of September 5, and the damage in the area much greater, the black smoke could be seen rising from miles away.

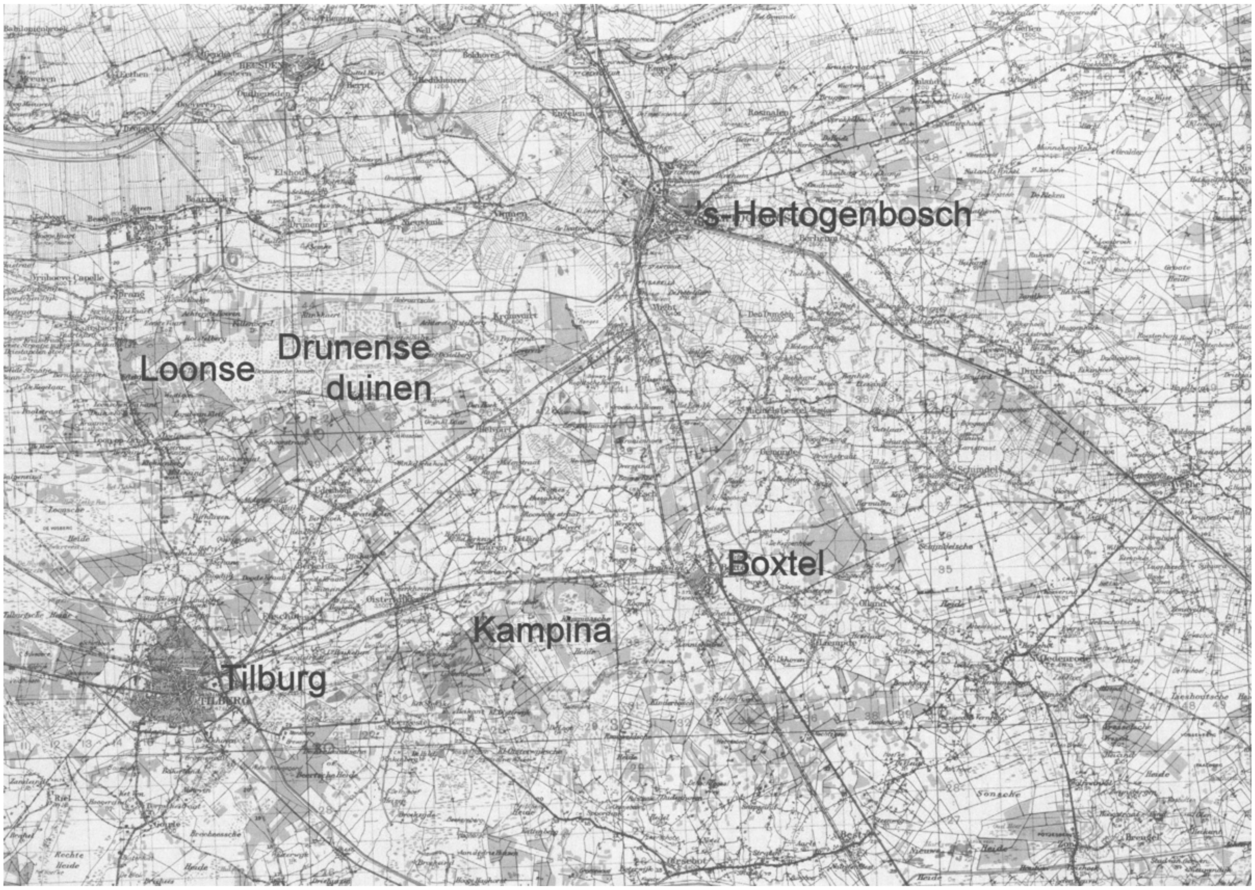
Drunen, one of the aforementioned villages very close to the Loonse en Drunense Duinen, had been an independent municipality prior to World War II, with the village of Elshout and the hamlets Giersbergen, Fellenoord, Klinkaert, and the Pesterd were its satellites. Drunen had over 5,000 inhabitants at the time and its main trade consisted of shoe manufacturing and metal industries. During the war, Lips shipping propeller industry of Drunen was required to work for the German war effort, however, despite this obligation the Board of Directors resisted in ways of non-cooperation, secretly 'employing' several men in hiding who were put on the company's pay roll, and hiding large amounts of copper to prevent the Germans from requisitioning it from them.

Around 7½ miles (12km) southeast of the Loonse en Drunense duinen lay the nature reserve of the Kampina. This area consists of about 1,200 acres of woods and fens with a large central moor. The area, stretching out to the west, touches the village of Oisterwijk with its forests and fens. To the north of the Kampina are the villages of Haaren and Esch and about 3 miles (5km) to the east the village of Boxtel. Around the Kampina are also the villages and hamlets of Tongeren, Luissel, Nergena, Roond, Lennisheuvel, De Logt, and Balsvoort. Along the south side of the Kampina a stream named Beerze runs from the southern village Spoordonk towards the hamlet Lennisheuvel.

During the occupation, the village of Oisterwijk was of major importance to the German Army as it lay on the railway line running from Tilburg to Boxtel. The Germans had large quantities of ammunition stored in well-concealed warehouses and bunkers in the woods bordering Oisterwijk and the ammunition was easily transported by trucks to and from the railway marshalling yard located near the center of Oisterwijk. The German Luftwaffe staff of Fliegerhorst Gilze-Rijen, a large military airfield which lay between the cities of Tilburg and Breda, was housed in the hotel Bos en Ven on the edge of the town. This airfield served as a base for German night fighters and bombers that were regularly sent on bombing missions to England.

Around 1940 Oisterwijk had a population of about 8,000 and had several dozen small tanneries and shoe factories. Leather work provided the main employment in the town and a sizable leather factory lay alongside the railway track. The Germans used this plant for their own war industry and as a large warehouse for medical supplies. This medical warehouse was called Wehrmacht Verplegungs Ambt (WVA).

During the first days of the operation, Allied reconnaissance made it clear that the Germans used Oisterwijk and Tilburg as depots for their operations to the northeast. As such, Oisterwijk was to find itself on the extreme western flank of the area of operations of the US 101st Airborne Division during *Market Garden*.



A map of 1944 with part of North Brabant. Long before World War II there was a railway junction in Boxtel with connections to Tilburg, Eindhoven, and 's-Hertogenbosch – the three major cities of North Brabant.

Boxtel

Long before World War II there was a railway junction in Boxtel with connections to Tilburg, Eindhoven, and ’s-Hertogenbosch – the three major cities of North Brabant. For that reason Boxtel enjoyed a large railway and train repair yard with a great number of railway employees living in the village. There was also an important road connecting the towns of Eindhoven and ’s-Hertogenbosch that ran straight through Boxtel. This proved very important for the Germans in terms of transportation and communication capabilities.

The River Dommel, which meanders through the village, rises in northeastern Belgium and flows through Eindhoven, Son, Sint-Oedenrode, and Sint-Michielsgestel to Boxtel, and then through ’s-Hertogenbosch to discharge in the larger Maas River. In order to prevent the town from flooding during high tide, a diversion canal, called Omleidings Canal, was dug between 1933 and 1936 to the east of the village.

During World War II Boxtel had more than 11,500 inhabitants together with a large German Army presence. The Allied corridor for Operation *Market Garden*, which ran from the Belgian border to Arnhem via Eindhoven and Nijmegen, was not that far away. Thus during September and October 1944, several German units passed through the town on their way to the battle or returning from it.

On September 17 and 18, elements of the German 59th Infantry Division arrived by train in Oisterwijk on their way to Boxtel. They were led by the German Divisional Commander, GenLt Walter Poppe. His troops detrained at Oisterwijk station because the railway track, halfway to the next station at Boxtel, had been blocked by members of the Oisterwijk resistance and members of the Central Brabant sabotage group (Sabotagegroep Midden Brabant) who were led by Bim van der Klei from Oisterwijk. By order of the Council of Resistance (RVV – Raad van Verzet), Bim van der Klei and his men had managed to derail a train full of NSB sympathizers and boxcars loaded with ammunition at Haaren on September 10, an incident that put both railway tracks out of action. This event coincided with a further successful attack, on September 16, carried out by six Typhoon fighter-bomber aircraft on an ammunition train in the railway marshalling yard which lay in the populated area around the railway station in Oisterwijk. This attack had a devastating effect not only on the railway track into the direction of Boxtel, but also on the houses in the immediate area, which were badly damaged.

Miraculously there were no deaths among the civilian population. Nevertheless, as a result of these actions the German infantry arriving in Oisterwijk then had to march along the road that ran parallel to the railway tracks onward to Boxtel.

At that time the area east of Boxtel was only lightly defended and, following the American 101st Airborne's arrival near Veghel and Son, the various troops of the German 59th Infantry Division, Grenadier Regiments 1034, 1035, and 1036, were moved up quickly from Schijndel, Liempde, and Best. GenLt Poppe moved into a building on the corner of Mgr. Wilmerstraat-Bosscheweg in Boxtel, where he would stay for more than a week. On September 28 he left Boxtel for the Leeuwenrode estate in the village of Esch.

During September the German paratroop general, Kurt Student, had been reorganizing his First Parachute Army, the Fallschirmjäger, one of the elite units of the German Luftwaffe, near the Dutch–Belgian border. He was reinforcing the German defences along their main line of defence close to the border by utilizing the remnants of several German army units as they retreated from France in the face of the advancing Allied armies. During this period, Colonel General Kurt Student had stationed his headquarters in a villa on the Huize Bergen estate in Vught.

In the early morning of September 23, German reinforcements arrived in the area east of Boxtel. They were Student's Fallschirmjäger of the 6th Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich von der Heydte. From this forming-up area his regiment advanced to Schijndel and Veghel along the Boxtel–Wesel railway line, known as the "German line" (Duits lijntje), with orders to retake the bridges across the Zuid–Willemsvaart and the village of Veghel.

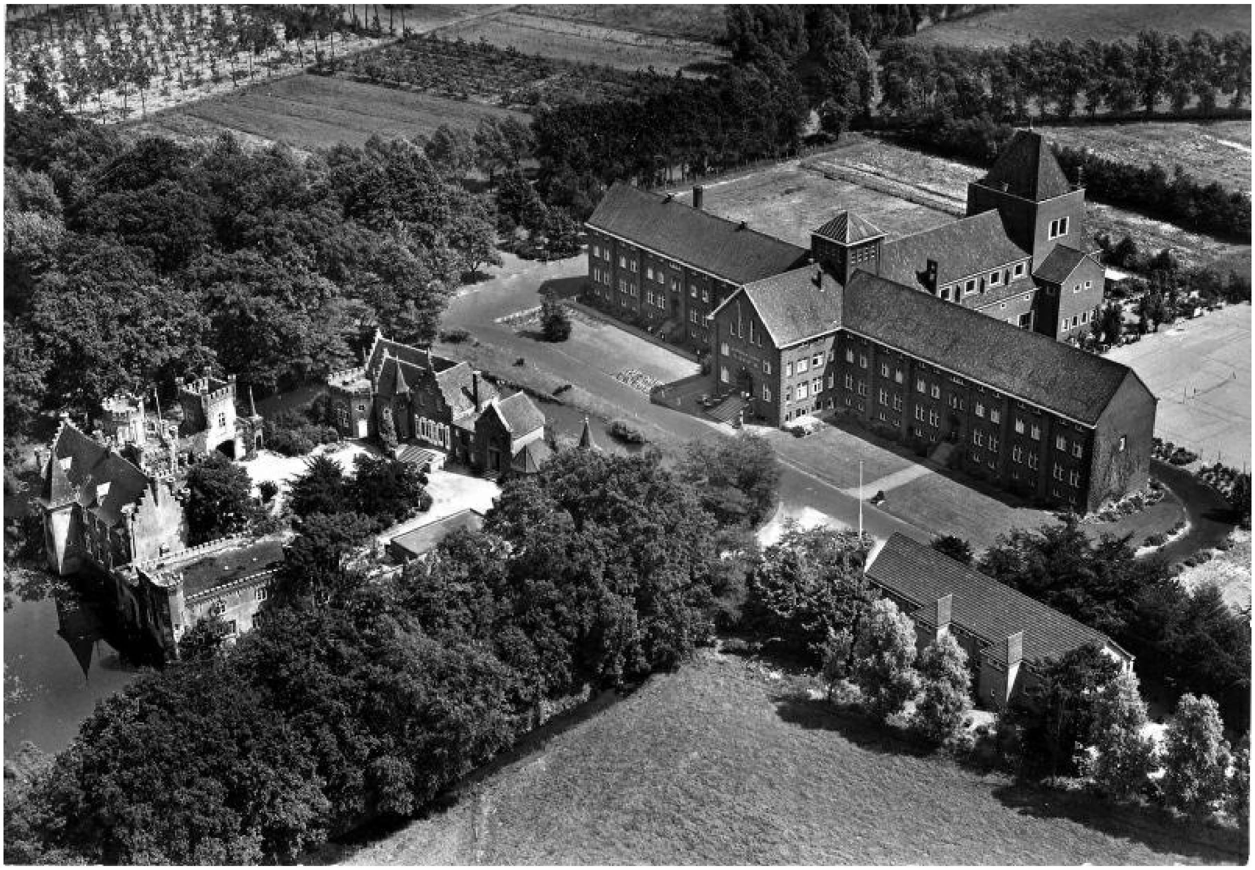
The "German line" ran from Boxtel all the way through Schijndel, Veghel, and Uden on to Gennep, where it crossed the Dutch-German border, to continue to the German town of Wesel. At the onset of World War II this railroad was of obvious significance to the German Army as it ran straight through the Dutch defences, the Peel-Raamstelling. This defensive line was intended to counter any German advance and consisted of antitank ditches, swamps, rivers, and canals, and included bunkers and barbed wire barricades. This major Dutch defence line ran from the river Maas at Grave all the way to the Zuid-Willemsvaart, near the Belgian border.

On the first day of war in May 1940, the railway bridge at the city of

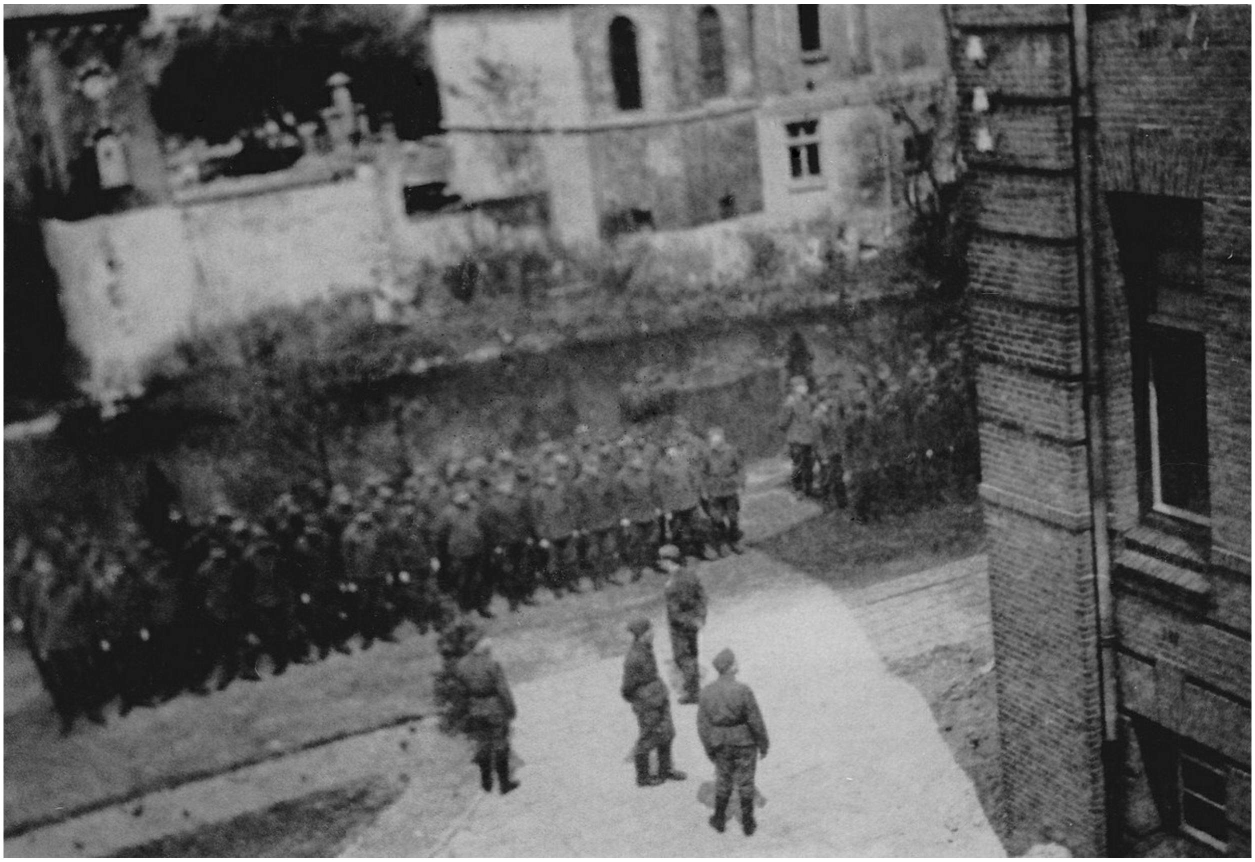
Gennep had fallen into German hands by treachery, thus breaking up that part of the Peel-Raamstelling and, with it, the Dutch defences.*

* Three members of the NSB disguised as Dutch military police had been able to take out the guards at the bridge before they could detonate the explosives rigged to the bridge. With the bridge secured an German armored train and a German troop train could cross the bridge and continue up to and beyond the Peel-Raamstelling where the Dutch defenders had no idea that war had broken out. They thought it was a Dutch train and did nothing. The German trains kept on driving for several miles until they reached a halt station at the village of Zeeland were the German soldiers detrained and engaged in battle with the Dutch forces.

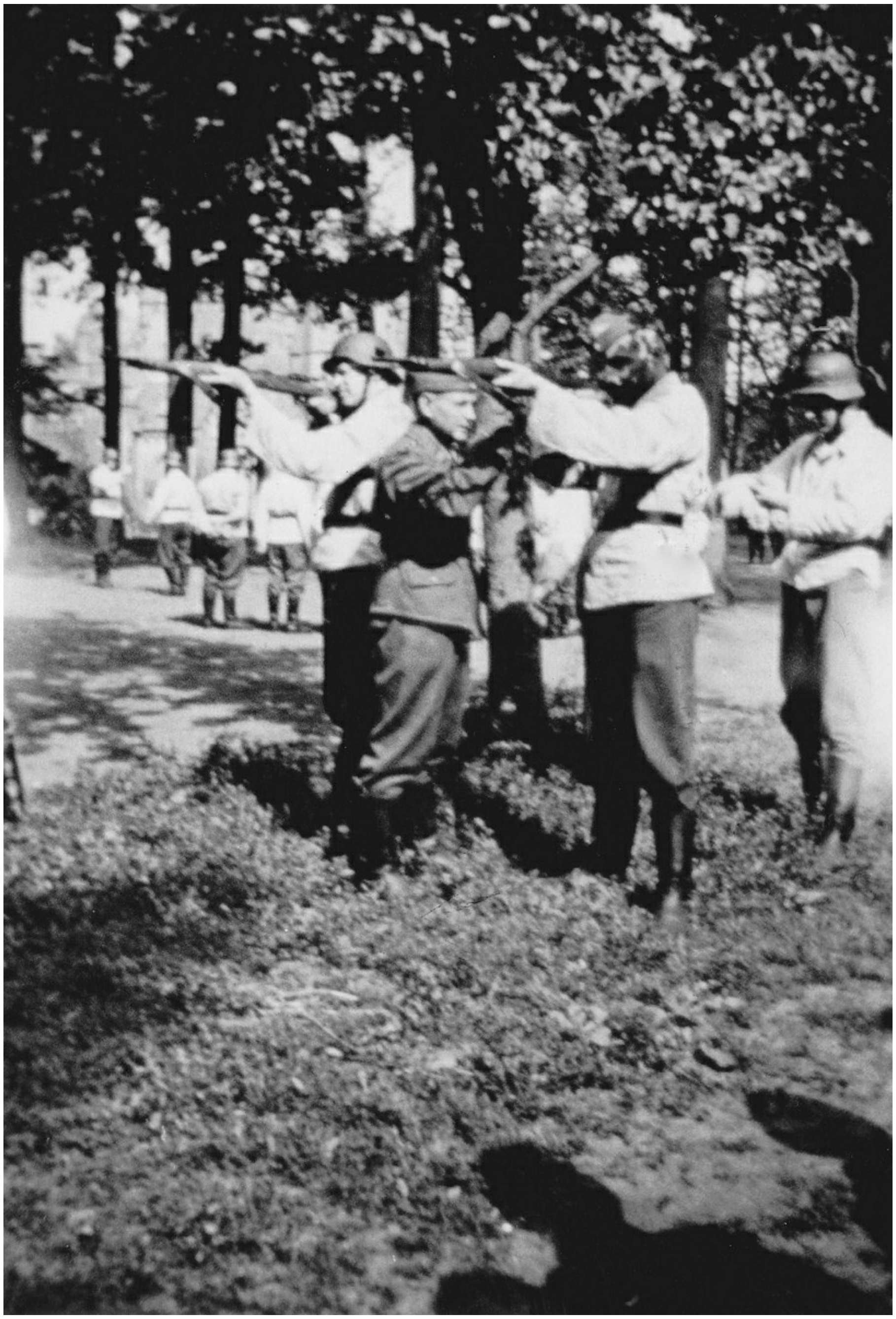
During the occupation, the Germans requisitioned a large number of buildings in Boxtel to accommodate their troops. Not surprisingly several monastic buildings were utilized by them for this purpose as they were big buildings and could accommodate a large amount of soldiers. The German troops were mainly servicemen of the Wehrmacht and Air Protection Warning Service (LSW, Luftschutz Warndienst). Between the spring of 1942 and September 1944 a school in support of this service was run by the Germans in Boxtel which was located in the seized Saint Ursula convent. The Luftschutz Warndienst in Boxtel also had an “Ausbildungs und Ersatz Abteilung” (a department for training and replacement) of Wehrmacht soldiers. Their duty was to warn the population of impending air attacks and to undertake this task they had to intercept various types of Allied communication systems from the Allied bomber formations flying overhead. They also had to operate searchlights to assist in the identification of these Allied formations. The soldiers would operate the air raid sirens before and after a bombing raid, and assist in maintaining order among citizens that had been affected by it. Members of the Luftschutz Warndienst were usually stationed at the locations of anti-aircraft batteries throughout German occupied territory.



Castle Stapelen and the St.Theresia-Mission House in Boxtel. (Brabants Centrum)



German soldiers in front of the St.Theresia-Misson House which was requisitioned by the German Army during the war. (G. Segers)



German soldiers are given instructions during shooting practice in the surroundings of Castle Stapelen. (G. Segers)

German officers in the surroundings of Castle Stapelen. (G. Segers)

German officers in the surroundings of Castle Stapelen. (G. Segers)

Chapter 2

A PREMATURE LANDING

A forced landing near Hoef ten Halve

During Operation *Market*, not all Allied troop transport, tug aircraft, and gliders would reach their targets at Eindhoven, Nijmegen, or Arnhem. From the first day of the operation, a large number of the gliders landed prematurely in the province of North Brabant due to a variety of reasons: sometimes because of engine failure of the tug aircraft; sometimes as the result of a broken tow rope; or sometimes due to the large number of German anti-aircraft guns that were situated in the area south of the provincial capital of ’s-Hertogenbosch.

On the first day of the operation the German anti-aircraft gunners were not very effective – as soon as they opened fire they were immediately set upon and attacked by the fighters escorting the transport fleet. In the following days, however, they were much better prepared and had significantly increased, and better concealed, the number of anti-aircraft guns in the area. They had also changed tactics and became much more effective by waiting until the fighter escort had passed by before opening fire. As such, the anti-aircraft gunners were able to inflict much more damage on the slow flying tugs and transport aircraft as they passed low overhead on their journeys to and from the drop and landing-zones.

The flimsy gliders also received rough treatment. The German anti-aircraft gunners aimed at the fuel tanks of the two and four-engine tug and transport aircraft or tried to hit the tail section to which the glider tow rope was attached. In the process, both tug and gliders were riddled with machine-gun fire or bits of shrapnel inflicting frequent and often serious injuries to the crew and airborne troop passengers. In some cases the exploding anti-aircraft shells created large holes in the aircraft, causing the fuel tanks to explode. In one instance the entire wing of a glider was shot off.

Because of this intense anti-aircraft fire, a number of aircraft were forced to crash, often with numerous casualties. Luckily a number of gliders were cast adrift after their tug aircraft had been hit and managed to make successful emergency landings in the area south of ’s-Hertogenbosch. Unfortunately, however, these landings were in the middle of German occupied territory and far away from their intended landing-zones.

Some of the crew of the stricken tug and transport aircraft were able to escape by parachute in the moments before the aircraft crashed, but once landed they also found themselves in occupied territory and had to disappear quickly to avoid capture.

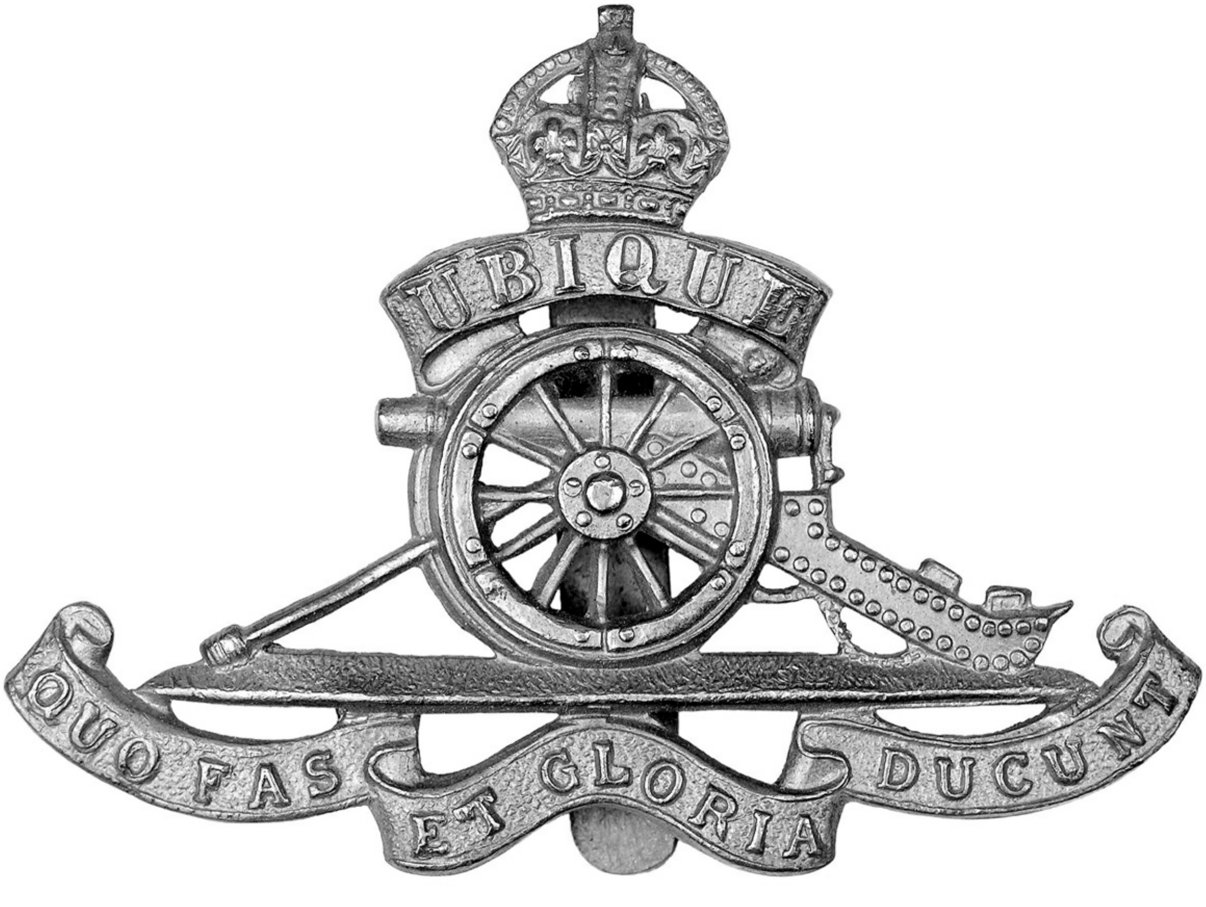
Once safely on the ground, many were quickly approached by helpful citizens or members of the local underground or resistance networks, the latter often being in a position to immediately guide these men to a temporary shelter or hiding place. It was difficult for these helpers to approach the airborne troops who suddenly found themselves on the ground in unfamiliar territory, as they were armed to the teeth, nervous, and ready to shoot first if they were not sure about who was approaching them. In most cases the Dutch approach with utmost caution and carefully sought ways to communicate.

Most airborne troops, pilots, and crewmembers in the troop carriers, tugs, and their gliders expected that they would safely reach their designated drop and landing-zones for Operation *Market Garden* without incident. Yet, it was inevitable that some aircraft, together with their crews, would come down prematurely over enemy occupied territory. For quite a large number of Allied Airborne soldiers Operation *Market Garden* would have a very different outcome from that anticipated. Their “flight” to freedom would make an early start.

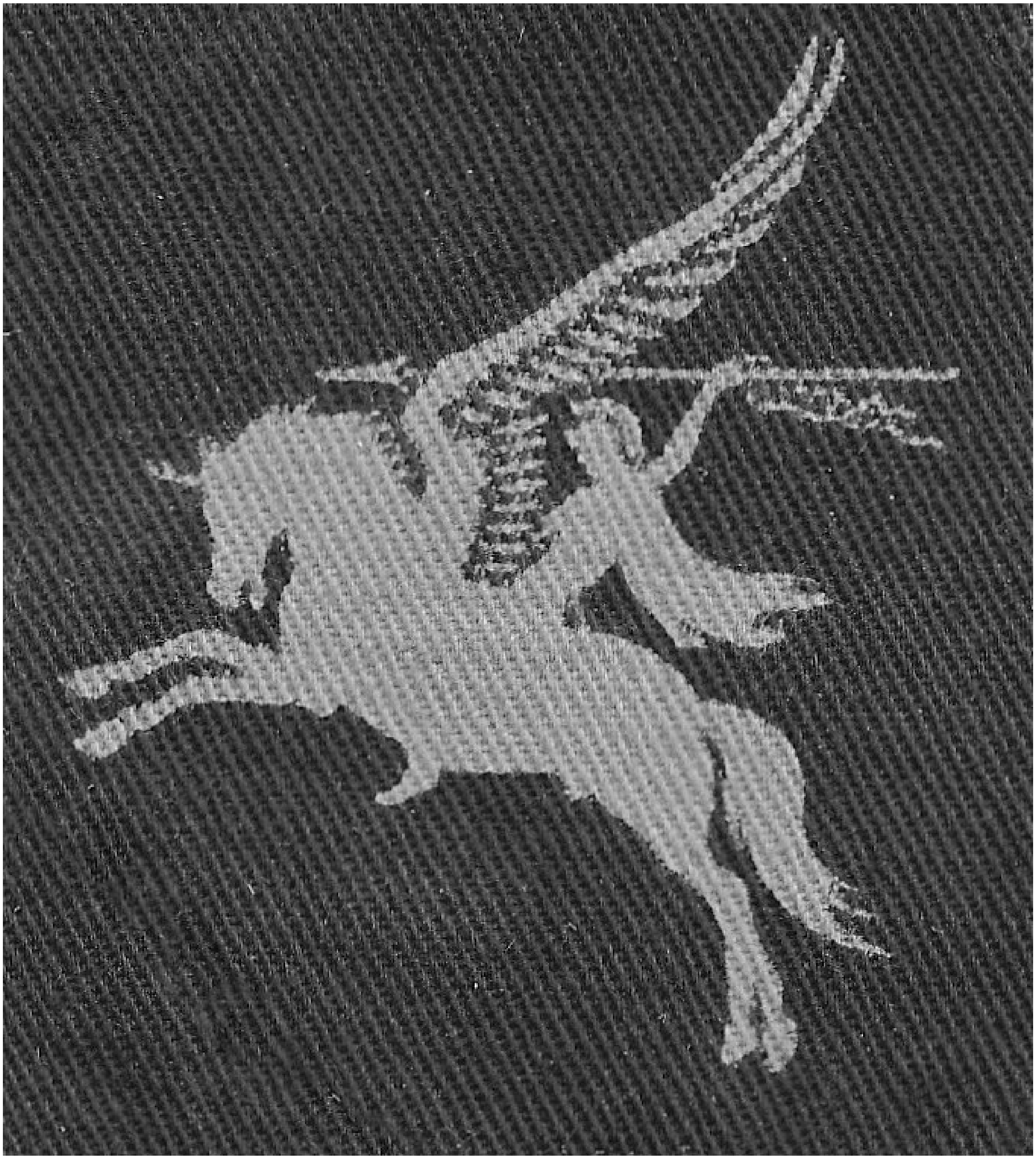
One of those gliders that made an early landing in occupied territory was a British Horsa glider, carrying airborne troops as part of the British 1st Airborne Division. In the early afternoon of September 17, this Horsa glider made a forced landing in the vicinity of the hamlet of Hoef ten Halve, south of the village of Drunen. The glider was destined for Arnhem and should have landed at landing-zone Z, which was a mixture of agricultural and heathland located west of Arnhem, between the villages of Wolfheze and Heelsum.

The Horsa glider, chalk number 509, had departed that morning at about 10.45 from RAF Station Fairford, in Gloucestershire. On board were two pilots of the Glider Pilot Regiment and four members of F Troop, 3rd Battery, 1st Air-landing Light Regiment, Royal Artillery, part of 1st Airborne Division. The glider pilots were 29-year-old S/ Sgt William Potts and 23-year-old Sgt George Stephenson. The four soldiers on board were the gun commander Sgt Leahy, Gnr Ford, Dvr Joblin, and L/Bdr Buckley. In addition to the four airborne men and the two pilots the glider carried a 75mm Pack howitzer, a Willys Jeep, and a small trailer.

The two British glider pilots of the Horsa glider, chalk number 509: Sgt Stephenson (left) and S/Sgt Potts (right). (G. Segers)


UBIQUE
QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT

Royal Artillery cap badge.



British 1st Airborne Division Emblem.

Between 10.30 and 11.30 on the morning of September 17, hundreds of four-engined bombers, escorted by fighters, had flown to the east on their way to attack targets in preparation for the airborne landings. Early in the afternoon, ever-increasing numbers of Allied fighters were emerging from the light clouds over North Brabant paving the way for a large armada of aircraft flying along the northern supply route to their drop and landing-zones. The hundreds of Allied troop transport planes, tug aircraft, and gliders were escorted by as many fighter aircraft. The sky was filled with aircraft, as far as the eye could see.

Seemingly slow and flying at a low altitude, the formations of transport and tug aircraft with their gliders behind them were approaching from Breda flying in the direction of ’s-Hertogenbosch. The Germans opened up with everything they had, a range of heavy to light anti-aircraft guns, machine guns, and rifles – in fact anything that could possibly damage the enemy planes. However, for the Germans this was not without risk, because as soon as the German anti-aircraft guns opened fire they would be spotted by the Allied fighter pilots who would close in on them, attacking them with rockets and machine guns.

Large formations of British medium bomber aircraft and Horsa gliders flying to the east over North Brabant territory during Operation *Market Garden*. (A.A.M Veltman)

Formations of Waco gliders being towed by C-47 Skytrain tug aircraft flying across North Brabant to their landing-zones. (A.A.M Veltman)

Somewhere in this vast air armada was the Horsa glider piloted by S/Sgt Potts and Sgt Stephenson, towed by a Short Stirling aircraft of 602 Squadron. (The Short Stirling was a dated four-engine bomber which in 1944 was used primarily for paratroop drops and towing gliders.) When, above Drunen's territory, Potts' tug aircraft attempted to climb through a large formation of clouds both glider pilots immediately lost sight of the Stirling and the huge updraft forced the glider upwards in an erratic climb. Potts could feel the tow-rope slacken appreciably and when the now invisible Stirling suddenly took up the slack again, the resultant jerk parted the 200-foot (60m) tow rope like a piece of twine. Separated from the tug at 3,000ft, the glider rapidly lost height. S/Sgt Potts had to land his Horsa safely and so descended as quickly as possible until, ahead of the glider, loomed a canal with fields and open areas on both sides where a landing could be made. Potts picked a parcel of moorland to the south of the canal and dived steeply until, just above the ground, he pulled up the glider's nose and made a perfect landing on the southern side of the Afwaterings Canal.

The glider came to rest on the piece of land known as "Margriet" (Daisy flower) close to the Helvoirtse Heide. Villagers and farmers from all over the area were quickly on the spot, having watched the glider coming down; a large group soon gathered. The downing of the glider also hadn’t escaped the attention of the Germans in the area and they quickly began to search for the spot where the glider had landed.

After the landing, the airborne men and the pilots immediately smashed down the rear door to exit the glider. While hundreds of aircraft above them continued towards their landing zones, the men hastily started to unload their glider, hoping to get the Jeep and gun out and head for Arnhem by road before the Germans appeared. While the men were busy unloading, their gun it tipped over just as it was almost clear of the glider and safely on the ground. At that moment one of the bystanders, Leo Elshout from Drunen, approached the British men.

Leo Elshout from Drunen. (A.A.M Veltman)

Leo managed to communicate to the men that they had landed in heavily occupied territory and that a group of about 20 German soldiers were on their way from the north. The men realized they would have no chance against a party of this size and, under the leadership of Sgt Leahy, hastily packed up the majority of their equipment and made their way in the direction of the woods which lay at the edge of the open moors and fields. With Leo up front acting as guide the men quickly set out deep into the woods of the Loonse en Drunense duinen, away from their glider and the advancing Germans. Leo told them of his role in the Dutch resistance while he guided the heavily armed soldiers a few miles in a south-westerly direction to a safer environment.

Meanwhile, the Germans had reached the spot where the glider had landed, finding no trace of its occupants. They were more interested, however, in the Willys Jeep they found still inside the glider. While the Germans continued their search the public interest continued to grow. Soon there were hundreds of Dutch citizens watching while a couple of Germans rode off in the Jeep to search for the British as the glider was looted and finally set on fire. The Germans then withdrew with their booty and the howitzer, leaving the burning glider behind.

A 75mm Pack howitzer gun in action at the front. Allied airborne units frequently used this lightweight American gun during the war. The Pack howitzer could be broken down into several pieces and easily transported by aircraft or glider and towed by a Jeep. (G. Segers)

British airborne troops on exercise leaving their landing-zone by a Willys Jeep which was adapted to allow it to be loaded into the Horsa or Waco (CG4A) gliders. (G. Segers)

The six British servicemen hid in the woods until nightfall and discussed their situation with Leo and other members of the local resistance who in the meantime had come to offer help. They proposed a plan to split the party into two groups to prevent the entire group falling into enemy hands. They offered to temporarily accommodate four men for the coming night in the village of Drunen and two men at a neighboring farmhouse until a more permanent solution would be found.

In order to avoid attracting attention, S/Sgt Potts, Sgt Stephenson, Sgt Leahy, and L/Bdr Buckley would go to Drunen dressed in civilian clothing. The soldiers gladly accepted their helpers' proposal and agreed they would leave for Drunen only lightly armed. While some resistance workers took care of Gnr Ford and Dvr Joblin, further arrangements were made for the four British men in Drunen. Two would be housed for one night in the home of Godfridus Visser in the Torenstraat, while the Rev Chaplain Simons of

Drunen would arrange for the other two to be accommodated for one night with the Dominican Fathers in Drunen. Earlier that evening the chaplain had visited those Dominican monks and had told them of the British glider's broken tow rope and its premature landing on the moorland. He had asked the Fathers if they were prepared to shelter two of the British soldiers, but promised that their stay would only be short because the following evening it was intended that they would be moved to another place. Having enough space for those two soldiers the Fathers readily agreed.

To the Dominican Fathers

The Dominican Fathers in Drunen had been evacuated from Nijmegen between February and April of 1944. After the Germans had requisitioned their school in the Dominicanenstraat, together with the vicarage building, the Fathers had left with the first class students of the college for Drunen. Since April 29 the Fathers and their students – 28 boys aged between 12 and 14 years old – had been housed in the old girls vicarage of Drunen that had originally served as a rectory with a small theatre.

The building, known locally as a monastery, had served as a cooking and sewing school but was also used as a baby clinic and pharmacy by the district nursing staff. Following a request by a former student of the college in Nijmegen, Joseph van der Vaart, the building had been offered by Pastor Ghoossens of Drunen to locate the students. The college in Drunen was run by three Dominican Fathers; Nol Meijers, Sjef Verschure, and William Schooneman. There was also a Dominican Brother by the name of Henry Gielkens. He was the cook of the college and had a room in the building.

The place was located on "d'n Achterompad," a small dirt road where a high wall hid the building from curious villagers. Through a gate one arrived at a small lawn with some trees, where a swing and rings were hung. From there on one looked directly at the small theatre hall, half of which was furnished as a dormitory while the other half served as a recreation room for the students. Some separate rooms had been created for Father Meijers and Brother Clement. From the recreation room a door led to the classroom in the left wing of the building complex. This had formerly been the rectory and had a door leading to the corridor opposite the kitchen. The latter was a large room with a sizeable coal stove in the center and big storage cupboards along the walls. The rooms of Father Verschure, the Deputy Representative, and Father Schooneman were in the gym building two minutes away.

The former girls' vicarage in Drunen. Here the evacuated Dominicans Fathers from Nijmegen were housed. (A.A.M Veltman)

Dominican Father Willem Schooneman, who taught Classic Languages for the college in Drunen. (Dominicanen Nederland)

Dominican Father Nol Meijers, one of the teachers at the college in Drunen.
(Dominicanen Nederland)

Dominican Father Sjef Verschure, Vicar (deputy) of the college in Drunen. (Dominicanen Nederland)

That evening, the four British soldiers received civilian clothing from their helpers and, after handing over their surplus equipment, ammunition, and weapons to the resistance, they went on foot towards Drunen under the guidance of Leo Elshout and a local constable by the name of Henk Stooter. When they arrived at around midnight the group split up and disappeared into the night on their way to their respective shelters. While Leo Elshout took the two British glider pilots to Torenstraat, Constable Henk Stooter took the other two to the Dominican Fathers. Here the two men were taken inside and made welcome.

The house of Godfridus Visser in the Torenstraat (A.A.M Veltman)

One of the Fathers asked about the cause of the broken tow rope and the subsequent premature landing in the moors, and was particularly curious about the reaction of the Luftwaffe. Was the Father assuming the cause of their premature landing was caused by the Luftwaffe? Apparently, Sgt Leahy was well aware to what the Father was alluding, because his answer was a high-handed sniff followed by the nonchalant gesture with which one chases away a mosquito. The Luftwaffe was as good as defeated by the Allies and they now ruled the skies over Holland. Thereupon Sgt Leahy unfolded his military map on the table and started to explain the military situation to the Fathers. With his finger he drew a line across the map running from Eindhoven to the Zuiderzee and made a gesture of all Germans west of that line being driven off into the North Sea. This made it perfectly clear to the Fathers why the British soldiers had come to Holland. The Fathers then poured out a kind of lemonade for their guests, which was mixed with some rough home distilled alcohol. The soldiers didn’t stop smoking Consi cigarettes and drinking from their lemonade; each smoke or sip of these Dutch products produced big smiles.

During the evening, while the soldiers were in hiding, C. van Tooren had collected as much of the abandoned ammunition from the forest as possible and temporarily stored it all at the house of fellow resistance loyalist Jan Veltman in Drunen. Later that night, this ammunition was collected again to be stored in a shed in the garden of Leo Elshout together with the remaining equipment, military clothing, two rifles, and ammunition that had also been collected the crash site by Elshout, Veltman, and van Tooren.

Separated from the group

That evening, while their comrades were being sheltered in Drunen, Gnr Ford and Dvr Joblin had been taken about half a mile (1km) to the west towards the hamlet Hoef ten Halve, situated west of the small settlement of Distelberg. Here they were taken to a farmstead where they could hide for the time being. This farmstead, called Ten Halve, was owned by a farmer named Van der Meijden and was located on a dirt road, also called Hoef ten Halve. Here the two men were given civilian clothing.

It was intended that the two soldiers would hide there only for a few days, however they would ultimately remain on the farmstead for five weeks until October 23. During this period they had to be constantly on their guard, as German soldiers were spotted in the area with increasing frequency and in growing numbers. One day a group of German soldiers unexpectedly appeared at the farmstead; luckily they were spotted just in time for Ford and Joblin to disappear into the nearby woods.

While they were hiding on the farmstead both men noticed that they were staying near a road that was frequently used by the Germans. According to the resistance workers, the Germans were using the road for the withdrawal of their troops, and the road was part of a route that ran from the front area east of Boxtel, through Vught and Helvoirt and across the Afwaterings Canal, toward the small fortified town of Heusden and the River Maas.

On one occasion, Ford and Joblin found a good spot at the edge of the adjacent forest from where they could observe the area. From here they watched a bridge over the Afwaterings Canal where Germans were hastily building defensive fortifications on the southern bank of the canal. Because of this discovery, coupled with messages from the BBC heard on a hidden Dutch radio, Ford and Joblin concluded that the British Second Army was closing in not only on the city of ’s-Hertogenbosch, but also in their area, and it would not be long before the farmstead would find itself in the middle of the front line.

With growing fears of being discovered on the farmstead and caught by the retreating Germans, the two men and their helpers decided that it would be better to move at the earliest opportunity to another safer hiding place. Over the following few days Ford and Joblin repeatedly had to retreat into the forest and hide for fear of a German visit.

The farmstead was frequently used in that period by the local resistance as a meeting place and a center for their undercover activities, for example they regularly attacked German soldiers that came wandering through the area, and stolen equipment was hidden there. The enemy soldiers would be disarmed and sometimes deprived of their uniforms.

On October 22 the Germans raided the place after having been tipped off, but the resistance received timely warning and had the farmstead cleared of any incriminating evidence. Ford and Joblin made their way out into the forest and everyone else kept well away from the farm. During the raid, however, the Germans found some pictures belonging to a German soldier who had been robbed by the resistance. It was not safe for Ford and Joblin to return to the farm, and while they hid in the forest, their helpers did their best to find a solution for them. Soon a new hiding place was found in ’s-Hertogenbosch where the two could hide in anticipation of the imminent arrival of their own troops who were getting ever closer to the city.

On the next morning of October 23, Ford and Joblin left their hiding place in the forest left the farmstead at Hoef ten Halve, aided by members of the resistance. Behaving like refugees from a bombed deaf and dumb institute in Sint-Michielsgestel, they began their journey towards ’s-Hertogenbosch. Both had been provided with a faked official letter explaining their assumed situation by the resistance in case they were held up at a German checkpoint. Fortunately the journey was without problems or delays, and the two safely reached their destination, a clog store next to a fishmongers in the Kolperstraat in the center of ’s-Hertogenbosch. This store was run by Geert Glaudemans, a reliable man, who was already hiding two men – father and son Rumling – in his house. Together with the Rumlings, Ford and Joblin men stayed in the upper chamber and were nicknamed “Dick” and “Bill” by their roommates.

That same night the British Second Army (53rd Division) started their advance on ’s-Hertogenbosch and two days later were closing in on the center of the city in an attempt to liberate that part. The retreating Germans established a defensive position close to the store in the Kolperstraat. Watching the events unfolding from the upper room windows one of the two British soldiers wanted to fire his Sten gun at the Germans located beneath him in an effort to take out the enemy’s position. Fearing the possible consequences of this action his fellow residents, however, managed with great difficulty to dissuade him from executing his risky intervention.

On the night of October 25 the center of ’s-Hertogenbosch was liberated by the British and Ford and Joblin could safely emerge from their hideout. Both men had been hiding in enemy territory for almost six weeks and had survived their adventure without a scratch thanks to the generous help of the local resistance. It would be much later before they would learn about the fate of their four fellow occupants of their glider. The entire town of ’s-Hertogenbosch would be liberated two days later on 27 October.

The landing of an American glider

On September 18, the other four men from the British glider were informed that Ford and Joblin would stay on the nearby farmhouse for the time being, and were further told that another glider had landed in the area that day. It turned out to contain American airborne troops and had landed north of the village of Biezenmortel in a field that bordered the edge of the Loonse en Drunense duinen, about 3 miles (5km) from Drunen.

It was an American CG-4A Waco glider with Chalk Number 28A, piloted by the 26-year-old American glider pilot F/ O Philip Jacobson from 434 Troop Carrier Group/72 Troop Carrier Squadron. The glider carried 14 American airborne troops of the 401st GIR (Glider Infantry Regiment)/101st Airborne Division/HQ Company. It was Jacobson’s second glider mission and, along with the rest of the squadron, he had taken off that morning, at around 11.15, from Aldermaston, a USAAF airfield in Berkshire, England. Jacobson was destined for landing-zone W, an area with many farms near the village of Son, north of Eindhoven. The airborne troops onboard his glider were to be deployed in battle in this area.

101st Airborne Division patch.

American glider pilot F/O Philip Jacobson just before one of his glider missions. Note the hand grenades hanging on his coat. (J. Korsten)

The airborne troops were under the command of 27-year-old American, S/Sgt Russell Vaught who, due to a shortage of glider pilots, sat in the co-pilot's seat during the flight. As was often the way in such cases, Vaught got a crash course from the glider pilot during the flight on how to act in case of an emergency. This "on the job" co-pilot had to help monitor the instruments during the flight and, after landing, assist in opening the top hinged cockpit if this was required. The 14 airborne troops on board the glider had to establish communication with their battalion to the north of Son. For this purpose a small trailer loaded with communication equipment accompanied the men onboard the glider.

On September 18, the second day of Operation *Market Garden*, the southern supply route across Belgium could not be used due to adverse weather conditions. Consequently, all the aircraft were re-routed along the northern supply route across the North Sea, directly to their drop and landing-zones. This meant the Allied air armada for that day consisted of over 1,500 transport planes and gliders, plus an additional 600 fighter aircraft. So for a second time an enormous air armada approaching from the province of Zeeland crossed North Brabant and once more the sky was filled with formations of Allied aircraft as far as the eye could see. Many of these formations consisted of gliders behind their tow planes.

When the formation entered the airspace over Loon op Zand, about ten minutes from their destination, it was hit by numerous rounds of small arms fire. It was a terrifying experience. If this was not enough, heavy German anti-aircraft fire came into action pounding on the tail and wings of the glider. Shrapnel hit the elevator disabling it and making the glider unstable. This forced Jacobson to immediately cut loose his glider from his tug and look for a suitable place to perform a safe landing. He selected a spot and managed to safely land his glider near a farm café called De rustende Jager, west of Zandkant on one of the pastures along Gommelsestraat owned by Willeke de Bakker and close to the nature reserve De Brand at the edge of the Loonse en Drunense duinen.

After the glider had come to a rest on the pasture, its passengers quickly disembarked. While some men assessed their damaged glider others painstakingly looked around for signs of any imminent danger from German troops stationed in the area. The tail and wings of the glider appeared to be full of holes from the German ground fire and the rough landing had badly damaged the nose and belly of the glider. All men appeared to be unharmed apart from 1st Sgt Paul “Smokey” Moukad, who had been slightly injured in his thigh from the enemy’s ground fire.

It was 2.30pm and within minutes of the glider’s landing some curious villagers cautiously strolled towards it, as the heavily-armed airborne troops gathered around it. The troops initially kept these people at a distance, brandishing their weapons, but after a while they realized the villagers were friendly and they were able to approach the soldiers. Amongst them was Frans Elshout, a member of the local resistance from nearby Drunen, and a local priest who walked with a limp.* The priest lived in the nearby mission house Sint Lambertus in an area called Laar near the village of Helvoirt, and while he had been coming through the area on his bike he had noticed the glider coming down and disappearing behind the tree line, and so had curiously gone in its direction.

* In his Escape and Evasion (E&E) report of October 30, 1944, S/Sgt Vaught refers to this priest as "Father Schelentroot."

Frans Elshout from Drunen. (A.A.M Veltman)

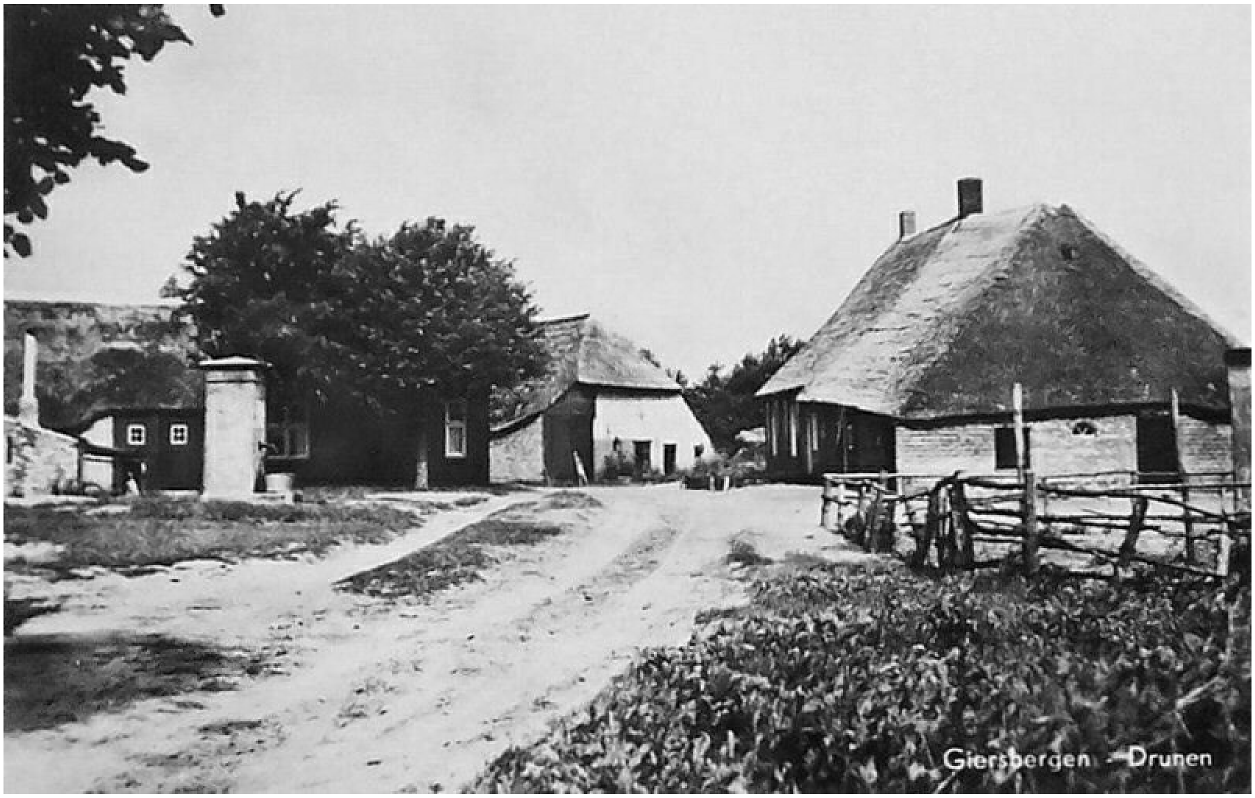
Although no German soldiers had been spotted, it was urgent for the airborne troops to move away from the crashed glider and hide in the nearby countryside as soon as possible. Frans Elshout and the priest both knew that a number of Germans were stationed in the nearby villages of Udenhout and Biezenmortel and could arrive at the landing site at any moment. They were able to explain to the Americans that they should follow them away from their glider to a safer spot in the woods. Before the troops left, they set fire to the glider in order to leave nothing of use or value to the Germans.

Lightly equipped with nothing more than their weapons and rations, the men left the area and, guided by the priest and Frans Elshout, disappeared in a northerly direction towards the farm café De Rustende Jager on the edge of the Loonse en Drunense duinen. From here they continued through the woods and sand dunes to a safe location on the edge of the nature reserve. Utmost caution was required moving through this area because of the proximity of German anti-aircraft units that were still shooting at the Allied aircraft overhead.

Detouring through the sand dunes and the woods it took almost three hours before they arrived at a safe spot in the woods near the hamlet of Giersbergen. Here Frans Elshout managed to contact his nephew, Leo Elshout, and C. van Tooren, who had already received a message that Frans was on his way with the Americans, heading towards Giersbergen, and were waiting in the vicinity. When they finally met up Van Tooren did the talking because he could speak a little English.

Leo Elshout introduced himself as member of the resistance group “Veltman.” This group was named after their leader Ad Veltman from Elshout, known also as “The Gangster,” and consisted of Leo’s nephew, David Elshout, and Henk Stooter.* Ad Veltman was a hydraulics official living at the Kapelstraat in Elshout. Leo Elshout was a driver/ mechanic and just like his nephew David Elshout, the butcher, lived at the Grotestraat in Drunen. Henk Stooter was a member of the Marechaussee, the Dutch Royal Military Police, and lived in the Veilingstraat in Elshout.

* Van Tooren and Frans Elshout, both from Drunen, were loyal to the resistance, but not officially members of any group.


Giersbergen - Drunen

The hamlet of Giersbergen which borders the Loonse en Drunense duinen.
(Heemkunde van de Oostelijke Langstraat)

The members of resistance group “Veltman.” From left to right; David Elshout, Henk Stooter, Leo Elshout, and their leader Ad Veltman. (A.A.M. Veltman)

Leo carried a small note given to him that afternoon by Sgt Leahy, who had been in hiding in Drunen since the night of September 17. Leo had informed Sgt Leahy about the landing of the American glider, and Leahy gave Leo the note to give to the Americans stating that Leahy would like to merge the men from his glider with the Americans. The note also confirmed that Leo Elshout could be totally trusted and further explained that it was Leo who had found safe accommodation for Leahy and his three fellow British evaders. Leo handed the note to S/ Sgt Russell Vaught, asking him to read it. The Americans, however, were not as confident in their Dutch helpers as the British had been so even after Vaught had read the note he remained extremely cautious.

Ultimately, after the resistance men finally gained sufficient trust from the Americans, it was agreed to try and bring together the four British from Drunen and merge them with the Americans in the woods to create a larger and stronger force. Around 7pm the resistance men left the Americans with the understanding that they would return later that evening to pick up the wounded Sgt Moukad and to take him to get his wound attended to in Drunen. Leo Elshout then went to Drunen and reported everything to the British, telling them of the plan to take them to the Americans in the woods near Giersbergen to create a stronger force.

Sgt Leahy, in charge of the group, agreed with Leo’s proposal and for safety reasons it was decided to travel to the woods in pairs of two. That same evening the British soldiers were given back their equipment, military clothing, weapons, and ammunition. At 10pm Sgt Leahy and L/Bdr Buckley were escorted to Ad Veltman’s house in the pitch dark. From there they would be guided to the American shelter in the forest early the following morning, September 19. The two British glider pilots Potts and Stephenson would follow later that morning.

Meanwhile, at about midnight Frans Elshout picked up the wounded American, Sgt Moukad, together with his glider pilot F/O Jacobson at their shelter and took them to his home in the Torenstraat in Drunen. There Moukad’s wound was taken care of by Dr Akkermans from Drunen while Jacobson, who shortly after the premature landing had become quite ill, was warming himself up.

After being treated by the doctor, Moukad and Jacobson were brought to the house of the Dominican Fathers, where, once again, a request for their hospitality was made on behalf of the resistance. They arrived there at 1.30am with Sgt Moukad limping from his wound and Jacobson bent double under the weight of his weapon and equipment as well as that of his comrade.

Once inside the men were invited to take food at the dining table. While they were both served sausages a conversation arose between the Fathers and their guests in which it was made clear that the Jewish pilot Jacobson didn’t believe in any higher goal of the war, such as fighting against evil or on the side of “right,” but believed the war was all about money. While Jacobson related his story, Moukad displayed a big smile. In appreciation of the homely atmosphere in the Fathers’ residence he then observed: “just like at home.” He apologized for his limping and said laconically, “I have one dollar bill heavier on this side than on the other.” The two Americans stayed overnight with the Fathers and the following morning were guided back to their comrades in the woods near Giersbergen.

Throughout the morning of September 19, Sgt Leahy and L/Bdr Buckley were taken to the Americans, followed soon after by Potts and Stephenson who had spent the previous night in the house of Godfridus Visser in the

Torenstraat. The enlarged group of airborne troops now consisted of 15 Americans and four British. The place where they were in hiding was dangerously close to a forest track that ran towards Giersbergen; they could hear the villagers and, sometimes, German soldiers as they made use of the track.

It didn’t take long for them to decide that they could not remain at this place and that another shelter had to be found soon. After a thorough exploration of the surrounding forests and moor lands a suitable place was found more to the west which would serve as a temporary shelter so later that morning the entire group set out for their new hiding place. During the move the ever-suspicious American S/ Sgt Vaught pushed his weapon into the back of Leo Elshout threatening that he would be the first to be shot if anything went wrong. Accordingly Leo Elshout was extremely relieved when he finally managed to guide the 19 airborne troops safely to their new shelter on the moor without encountering any problems on the way.

Chapter 3

YET MORE BRITISH AIRBORNE TROOPS

Airborne troops of the South Staffordshire Regiment

During the morning of September 19, in their new shelter on the moor of the Loonse en Drunense duinen, the four British and the 15 American soldiers were paid a visit by some members of another resistance group. One of them was Mayor Adrianus Smit from Sprang-Capelle. He informed them that since September 17 other British servicemen had been hiding in the area, and that they were being helped by the resistance group "André," of which he was a member.

The members of this group, which was named after one of its members, André Boesman, who had died prematurely of pneumonia, included men from Sprang-Capelle, Waalwijk, and other surrounding villages. The group leader and founder was A.L. Jos van Wijlen who also worked under the pseudonym of "André."

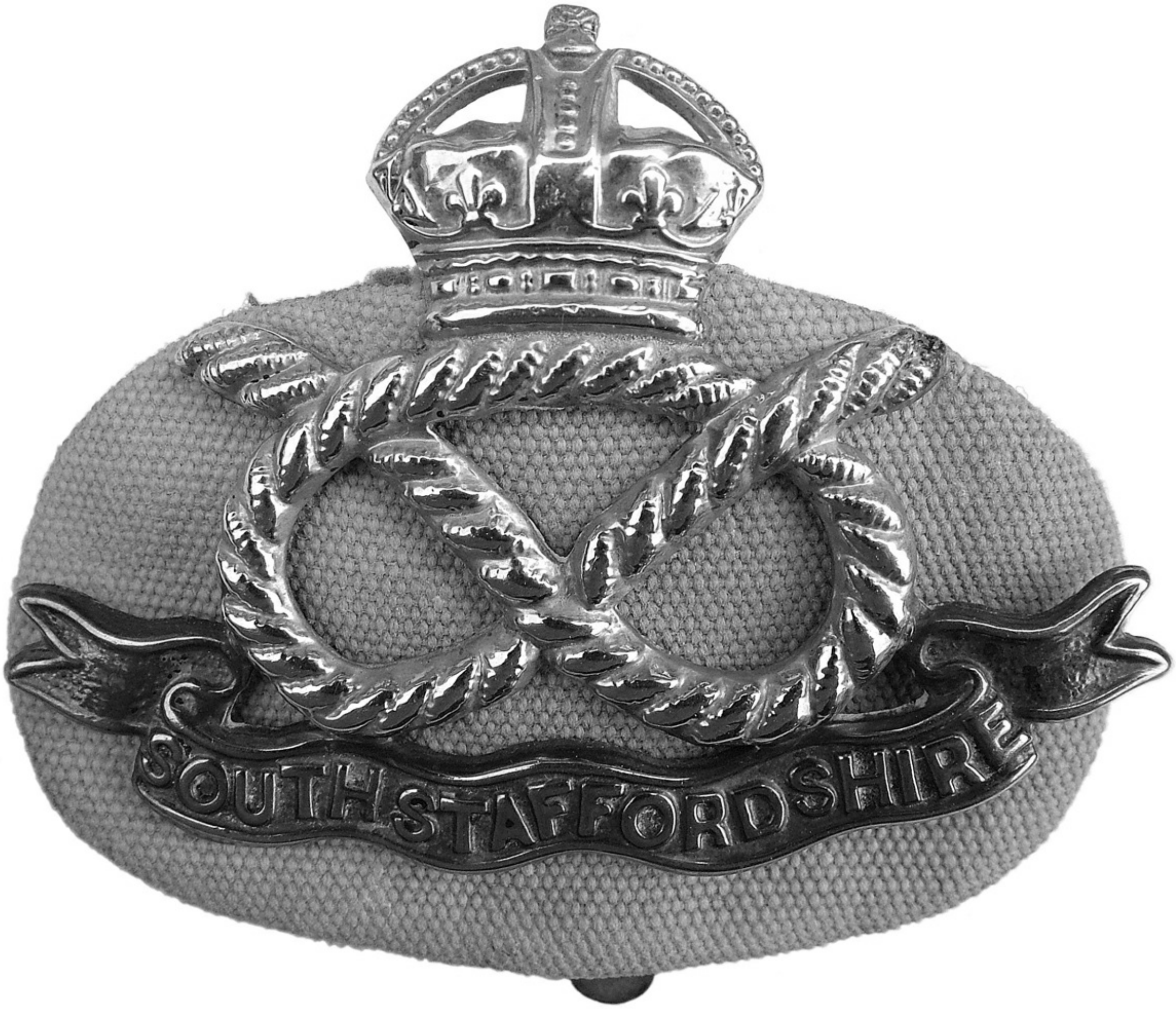
The group of British and American airborne troops suggested they should be brought into contact with the newly discovered group. This, it was suggested, could be done through a meeting with one representative from each group. This being agreed it was further decided that the meeting would take place in the André group's headquarters.

The other group of British servicemen consisted of gliderborne troops who had also landed prematurely on the first day of Operation *Market Garden*. Their Horsa glider had come down in an area of moors, forest, and agricultural land to the northeast of the village De Moer, located about 3½ miles (6km) from Tilburg. The airborne troops were from No.12 Platoon, B Company, 2nd Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment. This infantry battalion had been formed into an air landing battalion during late 1941/early 1942 and had already seen action in Sicily. It was during the invasion of this island, codenamed Operation *Husky* on July 9/10, 1943, that the battalion had been deployed in its new role for the first time. Now again, for *Market*

Garden, the battalion was being flown in by glider to a landing-zone near Arnhem.

No.12 platoon consisted of 26 airborne troops and was being led by the 30-year-old British lieutenant, Roland Sharp. This former bank employee from Stockport, Cheshire had been in the British Army for four and a half years. Sharp had been serving as 2nd lieutenant in the Royal Artillery Regiment, when, in April 1944, he transferred to the South Staffordshire Regiment, commanding No.12 Platoon (B Company) of the 2nd battalion as a lieutenant.

The Horsa glider that carried 12 Platoon on September 17 was Chalk Number 298, piloted by glider pilots lieutenants Roland Millar and Jimmy Barclay. It took off from RAF Manston in Kent at 10.50am, and was being towed by an Albemarle tug aircraft of the 297 Squadron/38 Group, piloted by F/O Shortman. The flight was to follow the northern supply route to Arnhem where the glider would be cast off to land on landing-zone S, north of Wolfheze. The Albemarle, known as Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle, was a British twin-engined transport aircraft that was originally designed as a medium bomber, before being adapted for the transport of paratroops and to serve as a tug for gliders.


SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE

Cap badge South Staffordshire Regiment.

To the right the two British glider pilots, Lt G.R. “Dusty” Millar and Lt J.H. “Jimmy” Barclay, with the wings above the left pockets of their jacket. To the left the British glider pilot, S/Sgt William Potts and below to the right glider pilot Sgt George Stephenson. (G. Segers)

The crossing of the North Sea to the Dutch coast passed quietly and the route across occupied territory had been devised to avoid the concentrations of German anti-aircraft batteries wherever possible. In some places, however, isolated anti-aircraft guns remained in action, but the shelling lasted only briefly and often was not very effective.

When the air armada approached the area north of Tilburg, the formations of transport planes and gliders flew into dense clouds and turbulence. Inside the glider it suddenly turned dark, the aircraft began to shake violently and to drift up and down. One of the round portholes was torn and the cold air screamed in. A door was jolted open and the men were lying at full length on the floor sprawled everywhere because they had been knocked out of their seats. One of the pilots had slid out of his seat and had a struggle to get back in.

The violent shaking also induced air sickness amongst some of the men. When the turbulence was over, the glider appeared to be flying above the tug and slightly to the right. From the glider the tow rope hung straight down and made a U-turn back up to the tug; it was also not hanging correctly from the glider. Instead of coming straight up, as it should, it went out on the port side, where the port yoke was, and was looped up and over the wing tip, just clear of the ailerons, the "tug end" coming over the top. Both glider pilots watched the rope as both tug and glider slowly levelled out, praying at the same time that the slack would be taken up without a sudden jerk. As the slack was being taken up there was a terrific vibration to the glider as the port yoke burst under the strain. Then, about 20 feet (60m) out and just beyond the splice, one of the strands of the tow rope was cut by Flak. The loose strand suddenly sprung up about three inches higher than the other two, slowly unravelling at first but clearly getting faster. When the loose ends had about 3 feet (90cm) of whip, the other two strands quickly started to unravel and pull apart. That was it. The tug shot off with its loose tow rope and the Horsa was separated from the tug over the village of De Moer.

The Germans in this area were shooting fiercely, forcing the Horsa to get to the ground as quickly as possible. Looking around, the pilots desperately sought a suitable site for landing. They put the glider into a steep dive down and pulled its nose up when they were close to the ground. Skimming over the tops of the trees and some houses, a field was selected for landing. The passengers, locked arm in arm, held firmly together, and pressed their feet up against the seats opposite in case the landing gear would be forced up through the bottom of the glider. The glider then wildly ploughed through a potato field and came to a halt within a few hundred yards of a forest. The airborne troops in the back threw open the doors and were out in a shot. They quickly opened the large side door, gathered their equipment, and ran for the woods. Apart from some minor cuts and bruises there were, fortunately, no serious injuries among the men.

Within minutes the glider had attracted 50 or more curious people from the surroundings, some shouting joyfully. Suddenly someone shouted "Germans!" and as quickly as these civilians had appeared, they were gone. While the airborne troops were withdrawing deeper into the adjacent forest, Lt Sharp and one of his men, a scout who was carrying a rifle with telescopic sights, sneaked up to a shed. This shed stood just inside the field’s perimeter and from its concealment both men could monitor the area well. It was not long before they saw German soldiers approaching from about 600 yards (550m) away. Quickly both Sharp and the scout left the shed and crawled back to the relative safety of the forest.

When Lt Sharp rejoined his platoon gathered in the dense forest, he was surprised to find a girl and a boy hanging around. Both had approached the platoon from another side while the lieutenant and his scout were hidden behind the shed. To Sharp’s surprise the girl introduced herself in perfect English and explained to him she was a member of the local resistance and could be trusted. Moreover she appeared to be a member of the local Red Cross and asked if she could put the lieutenant in touch with the leader of the resistance. She then explained the rough position of the platoon, specifically pointing out they had landed near the village of De Moer. Then she enquired whether they had brought any weapons for her group. Sharp answered that this was not the case, as his platoon had not landed to provide arms for her organization, but instead had to get to Arnhem to join his brigade as soon as possible.

Lt Sharp quickly gathered his platoon and gave instructions for his men to leave. While he was preparing to set out to the east, the girl advised him not to do so. She made it clear that in that direction he and his platoon would be running into occupied territory where, according to her, many Germans were present. She explained that the lieutenant and his men should first go to the north and then, later, turn east in the direction of Arnhem.

The lieutenant followed her advice and turned his group quickly to the north, moving away from both the glider and the advancing Germans. At the nearest farm a few miles away Lt Sharp and his platoon took up defensive positions in case the Germans had seen his group leave and were in pursuit. Sharp peered anxiously through his binoculars in the direction of the woods but saw not a single German.

Meanwhile, the alerted Germans had arrived at the landing site of the glider, but they were too late as no trace of the occupants was to be seen. They searched through the Horsa for a while and after concluding there wasn't anything of interest, they set fire to it. They then started firing their weapons into the forest under the mistaken impression that their enemy was hiding there. Following this they set off to undertake a search of the area adjoining the forest.

Alarmed by the sound of the shooting and far from eager to engage in a confrontation with these Germans, Lt Sharp didn't lose any time in marching his platoon to the north, away from the landing site and the farm. Two of his men were having great difficulty pulling their small handcart which was packed with rations and boxed ammunition and it was extremely hard for them to keep up with the group. While dragging the handcart forward across the ploughed and uneven fields, they continued to hear the shots from the German weapons behind them. Both men thought it better to unload the handcart and leave it behind.

In the center the British commander of the South Staffordshire Regiment, Lt Roland Sharp. To his right stand his sergeant, Ernest Cutforth. (G. Segers)

British airborne troops exercising in leaving a Horsa glider (G. Segers)

A platoon of the South Staffordshire Regiment during exercise *Mush* in April 1944. In the center two men are dragging a handcart. (G. Segers)

Accompanied and guided through the area by the girl and the boy, the group of heavily loaded airborne troops continued its march and disappeared into a pine forest. Meanwhile, the Germans searched the area and found nothing but didn’t dare to enter the forest for fear of being ambushed by their enemy. After a walk of two hours through the woods and farmlands, the men came upon a large ditch adjacent to an open area. It was agreed to wait there for further assistance from the local resistance, which the girl and the boy were going to organize. Slipping into the ditch, the men laid themselves down to rest.

At around 10pm, the British saw a small group of civilians approaching, some of them on bicycles. It turned out to be their assistance. For “men of the resistance” they appeared to be quite young, with some of them no more than boys. With soft, low voices they introduced themselves and motioned the soldiers to follow them. The men climbed from the large ditch and disappeared behind their guides into the dark night. A long march followed through muddy fields and crossing many ditches, until, after four hours, they hit upon an embankment, behind which a broad river blinked in the moonlight. Tired, the men crossed the embankment to slide down on the other side to the edge of the river.

While they stopped for a rest from, some of the men suddenly saw a vessel approaching from the opposite bank of the river that was overgrown with reeds. When it came slowly closer, they noticed with a shock the outlines of three men in German uniform on the boat. Immediately some of the British took up their arms, but they were told not to worry because the boatmen were actually members of the resistance who had come to collect them. Relieved and full of respect for these brave Dutch citizens, all embarked onto the ferry as quickly and quietly as possible. Once loaded, the heavily laden vessel was propelled by a long pole towards to the other side. After crossing the group quickly disembarked and assembled on the shore to continue their journey under the guidance of some of the resistance members.

The group soon reached a house not far from the shore. After knocking the door was gently opened and a person appeared in the doorway. A whispered conversation followed and the door was further opened to let the group inside. Tired, dirty and wet from the mud, and loaded with weapons and ammunition the airborne troops entered the house. They congregated in a large spacious kitchen with a cast-iron stove and a large fireplace. In the center of the kitchen was a large oak table with some chairs. Everyone found a place to get some rest. The water kettle was put on the fire for tea. Meanwhile, the men of the resistance deliberated how they could get their British guests to Arnhem as quickly as possible. They promised to obtain a truck with which they could take Lt Sharp and his platoon to Arnhem within a few days.

The group stayed in the house for about an hour, before moving on. Once again guided by some men of the resistance they walked towards the east of the island. About halfway they arrived at a black barn with some haystacks near the banks of the river. While guards were posted outside, the rest were led into the barn. Inside some candles were lit and everyone found a place on the ground. They would remain here for the next two days.

The group was on an island on the Bergsche Maas, east of the village Keizersveer. In the meantime it was discovered that Pte William Julian was no longer with them. During a break on the march towards the river Julian had fallen asleep, something that had not been noticed when the group had continued its journey. When he finally awoke he found that the others had already left, and he took a route which he hoped would take him in the same direction. At some point he had dared to knock on the door of a house and asked for help. The surprised residents had offered him a place to sleep.

Two resistance men who assisted Sharp's group gave their names as Steven and Bernard and said that they came from Sprang-Capelle.* They remained and assisted the British airborne troops hiding in the barn on the island near the Bergsche Maas until the 19th of September. The people who had helped Private Julian managed to contact the resistance who collected him and reunited him with his group in the farm barn.

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* The names Steven and Bernard were mentioned in an English report made after Operation Market Garden and were probably aliases. It has not been possible to establish their true identities.

Up to the hideout near Giersbergen

On September 19 one of the British guards saw a couple of Germans in the distance standing on a bridge surveying the island with their binoculars. That evening the British learned from the resistance that the Germans were planning to search the whole area the following morning, including a number of farms. Earlier in the day Lt Sharp had received, once again through a resistance worker, a note from Sgt Leahy, who was in hiding with the Americans near Giersbergen. The note had been brought to the headquarters of the group André by the British glider pilot S/ Sgt Potts. Dressed as a civilian, he and Leo Elshout, of the group Veltman, had cycled to the headquarters 9 miles (15km) from his hideout. He had passed the note to a member of the group André who, in turn, had taken it to Lieutenant Sharp on the island.

After reading the note Sharp ordered Sgt Cutforth to dress in civilian clothing and return with the resistance messenger to the André headquarters to make contact with Staff Sergeant Potts. During this subsequent meeting it was arranged to move Lt Sharp's group to the Loonse en Drunense duinen that same evening in order to link them up with the four British and 15 American airborne troops already there. Leo Elshout and a representative of the group André agreed that the Group Veltman would provide another place to stay, large enough for the entire group of airborne troops and would also show them a route to the nearest front line.

Late in the evening of September 19, Lt Sharp’s group waited ready to cover the 13½ miles (22km) to the Loonse en Drunense duinen. Long after curfew the group was loaded into an old truck at the barn. The driver and a Dutch/ German co-driver were both dressed in German uniforms and had false papers with them in case they were stopped at a check point. The co-driver would then do the talking.

Under a canvas cover the men sat packed together in the back of the truck, their weapons at the ready in case anything should go wrong. The truck set out in the pitch dark and drove slowly towards a bridge at the east of the island – this bridge had to be crossed to reach the mainland. When the truck arrived at the bridge the driver had to take a sharp turn to get onto the steep incline of the bridge. During this manoeuvre, however, the driver hit the wooden railing which caused the engine to stall, bringing the truck to a halt. After a number of the British passengers had pushed the old lorry back into life again, the ride continued across the bridge to the other side and soon they found themselves in open terrain. The ride then went by main road from one village to another until the truck suddenly came to a standstill around 1am. They had reached the spot where the platoon would get off to continue the second leg of their journey on foot to Giersbergen. They were now at “Plantloon,” a forest cum pasture area south of Waalwijk. The men climbed down from the overloaded lorry and gathered in the dark. They were grateful that they had reached this far without incident and were happy to be able to stretch their legs again.

After the truck turned around and disappeared back into the dark night the men set out for their long march. They first crossed some woods until they arrived at the Afwaterings Canal, which they followed for some time, eventually arriving near a bridge that crossed the canal. At this bridge they met Ad Veltman and Mayor Smith, who had been waiting for them since 9.30pm to guide the troops to the area where the other airborne soldiers were hiding. Contact was made by password and the march soon continued with Ad Veltman as their guide. After marching through the dark woods the group finally reached the other group on the moor. The four British and 15 Americans were introduced to the party of South Staffords and everyone found a place to rest. A plan was discussed for how to push through to the British frontline with the whole group. This move was to be led by Jan Mallens. Mallens was a member of the resistance group André and originally came from the village of Kaatsheuvel but had been hiding on a farm near the village of Udenhout because of his resistance activities.

Joblin and Ford, who had been in hiding on the farmstead at Hoef ten Halve near Distelberg, were also brought over to this hideout on the moor and joined the group attempted to reach their own lines. The two men arrived in civilian clothing because their military clothing had been burned and destroyed for security reasons by their Dutch helpers after they arrived on the farm. Their helpers thought that it would be safer if they stayed on the farmstead disguised as civilians because there was always a chance of an unexpected Germans visit. However, as they were not in uniform it was felt that they could not accompany the group on their journey to the front line; any civilian caught by the Germans while in the company of Allied soldiers could be shot on the spot, so Joblin and Ford were taken back to their hiding place. After saying farewell the other resistance members returned to their homes with the knowledge that their task had been successfully accomplished. A short while later the enlarged group, now counting 47 men, set out for the frontline.

However, the journey towards the British frontline appeared far more difficult than anticipated and it was soon realised that it would be virtually impossible for them to reach their objective. Jan Mallens came to the conclusion that he could see no way that it could be achieved in the face of all the dangers and obstacles that lay ahead. The group was not happy with the situation and, reluctantly, they returned to their starting point near Giersbergen. The following morning, and to their great surprise, the group Veltman was asked by Lt Sharp to come to the hideout on the moor again. When the four members of this resistance group arrived they found Frans Elshout and Jan Veltman, both responsible for supplying food to the troops, already present. Also there was C. van Tooren and he had somehow installed a radio to enable the soldiers to listen to the news about the war.

After some time other members of the resistance group André arrived on the moor. It soon became clear that a serious problem had arisen the previous night. Lt Sharp did not understand all the ins and outs and the more the underground came up with all kinds of solutions, the less confident Sharp began to feel felt about their current situation.

It also appeared that their current hideout was not that safe. It was located close to open terrain and German soldiers had been regularly spotted in the vicinity. Sharp and some of the NCOs were also told that it had become too dangerous for the local people to bring them food and that they had a choice of either staying where they were, in which case they would get nothing to eat, or move into the village. After some discussion it was decided to try hiding the troops in the villages of Drunen and Elshout. The two resistance groups also agreed that the responsibility for the care of the entire group of evaders would, in future, be the responsibility of the four members of the Veltman group.

Chapter 4

DRUNEN AND ELSHOUT

Hidden in a café and in an institution

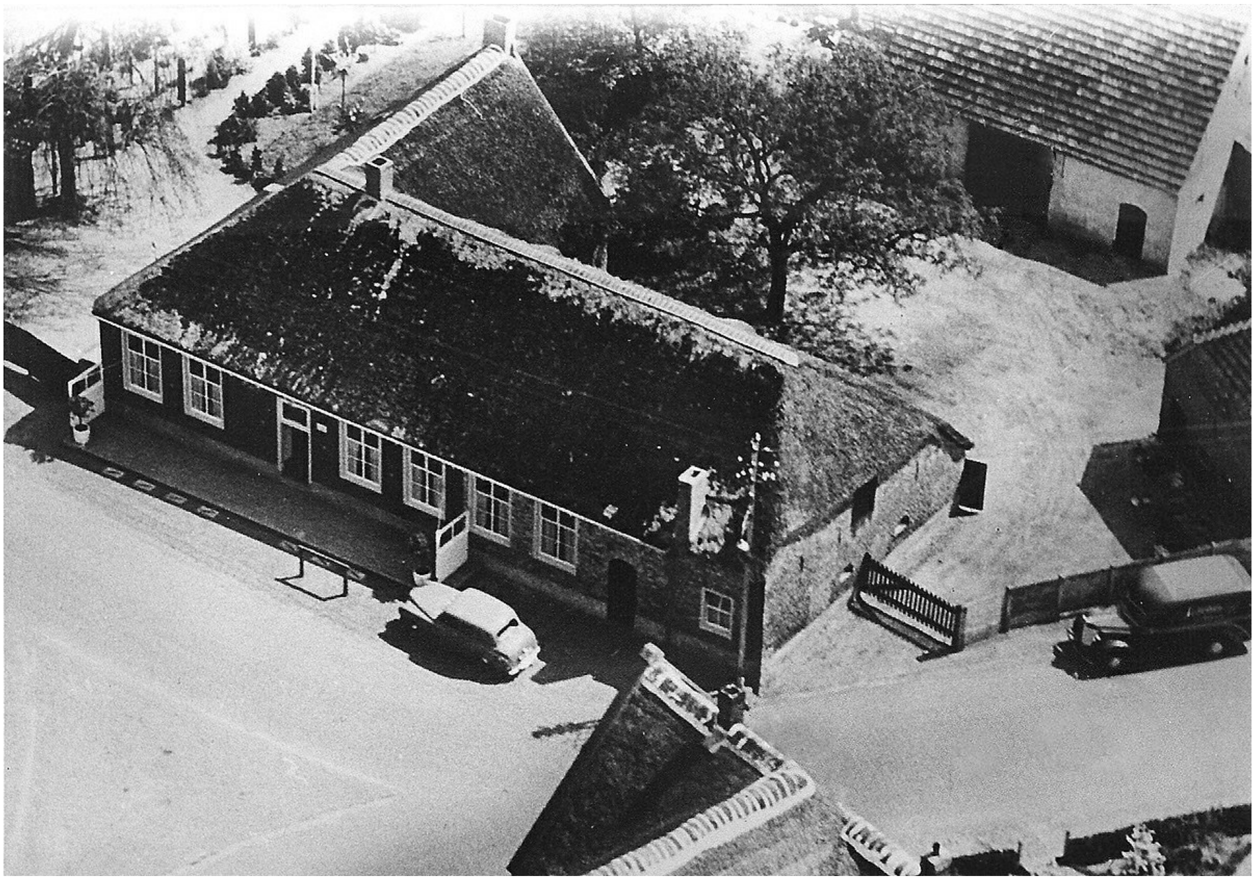
At 10pm on the evening of September 20, the group of 47 airborne troops gathered at the forest's edge of the Loonse en Drunense duinen. Leo and David Elshout had arranged shelter for the 15 Americans and four British with the help of Chaplain Simons, while Ad Veltman had found a solution for the South Staffords. In spite of the curfew lasting from 8pm to 4am the whole group set off, the Americans and the four British in the lead, followed by the Staffords. After the group had safely crossed a bridge over the Afwaterings Canal they entered the polder, similar to a ditch, between the canal and Drunen. The Staffords, carrying their heavy military equipment, had great difficulty keeping up with the lightly equipped Americans. They marched at a high speed and the Staffords soon lost sight of them in the dark; Lt Sharp ran ahead to stop the Americans and made them wait so that the others could catch up. After that, all went well until they reached the main road that crossed Drunen. The Americans crossed immediately and were soon out of sight. The Staffords were a little more cautious in their movements and, once on the other side, realised that they not only lost the Americans and the other British soldiers, but also their guides. Moving through the back gardens of the houses that bordered the main road they soon reached open terrain where they decided to wait hoping that their helpers would soon find them again.

Half an hour later, Ad Veltman and Henk Stooter arrived and guided them through another polder. The 26 Staffords and their two glider pilots, lieutenants Millar and Barclay, were taken to a large barn behind a café at Heusdenseweg 17 in Elshout. This café, called In den gekroonden Hoed, belonged to Ad Veltman's sisters-in-law, Antoinette and Cor Klerks. Via a large gate the men entered the courtyard behind the café, and after having crossed it they entered the barn. Inside, the windows were covered so that they could illuminate the interior without being discovered. The men put down their equipment and while some made tea others replenished their water bottles in the café's kitchen.

Antoinette Klerks from Elshout. (A.A.M. Veltman)

Cor Klerks from Elshout. (A.A.M. Veltman)

Ad Veltman, “The Gangster.” (A.A.M. Veltman)



The farmhouse cum café, In den gekroonden Hoed, belonging to the Klerks in Elshout. Visible behind the café is the barn where Lt Sharp and his platoon were hidden. The photo dates from after the war. (A.A.M. Veltman)

While the Staffords were taken to Elshout, the other four British and 15 Americans had been taken to their temporary hiding place with the Dominican Fathers in Drunen. At around midnight they arrived there under the guidance of Leo and David Elshout and silently went inside. In the morning light the Fathers noticed the racial diversity of the Americans. Sgt Moukad remarked that by the goodness of Uncle Sam all had been made Americans. “Uncle Sam is a good Uncle,” he declared.

Now that the troops were accommodated in their hiding place sufficient food had to be supplied to feed the hungry men. In the meantime Ad Veltman had taken charge of the food supply for the 28 South Staffords. The Klerks sisters, among them Henriëtte, Ad Veltman’s wife, took care of the coffee and the hot meals. These meals consisted mainly of mashed potatoes served in a large zinc tub with apples as a desert. Leo Elshout and the Dominicans

Fathers provided the meals for their 19 guests. David Elshout and Henk Stooter found a few willing villagers who would also provide food for the men, while Piet Elshout of the shoe factory Rex at Drunen supplied provisions and tobacco. The Klerks sisters' hidden radio, which was used to listen to the BBC broadcasts, was taken out of its hiding-place and together with a few extra tables taken to the barn.

An accident during weapons cleaning

After breakfast on the morning of September 21, the South Staffords began their regular weapon maintenance. Unfortunately during the cleaning process a Sten gun went off accidentally and hit Pte Charlie Weate in the thigh. Ad Veltman was in the Klerks sisters' kitchen at the time and, hearing the shots, he ran to the barn to see what in heaven's name had happened. Inside he found the wounded Weate lying between his mates. Lt Sharp approached asked if Veltman could fetch a doctor. He promised to do this at once and so Dr Akkermans from Drunen was approached for a second time. He came to Elshout but could do little more than provide initial first aid. The wound was too large and, according to Dr Akkermans, it had to be treated in hospital. The doctor had contacts in the Sint Nicolaas hospital in Waalwijk and he said that he would make enquiries to see if Private Weate could be treated there.

After the doctor had consulted the surgeon Dr Karthaus, he returned with the message that Weate could be taken to Waalwijk the following evening. A plan was made to dress Weate in civilian clothing and take him to the hospital in a car with Red Cross markings that was kept in Leo Elshout's garage in Drunen. However, that same evening the car was confiscated by the Germans leaving the resistance with no option than to transport Weate to the Sint Nicolaas hospital by bicycle.

The following morning, September 22, Ad Veltman and Leo Elshout took Weate to Waalwijk by bicycle. Because the Germans regularly used to confiscate bicycles during their checks on the main road to Waalwijk, they followed minor roads and tracks as much as possible. After a journey of about 5 miles (8km) they arrived safely at the Sint Nicolaas hospital where Weate was cared for by Matron Irmengard, Sister Superior, and head of nursing, Sister Laetitia after the surgeon had removed two bullets and some wood splinters from Weate's thigh. He would have to stay in the hospital for a couple of days to build up his strength before returning to Drunen.

The Sint Nicolaas hospital in Waalwijk. (A.A.M Veltman)

The café in Elshout was situated along the main road from Drunen to

Heusden. This road was being used ever more frequently by the retreating German troops who were daily passing by. During the afternoon of September 22 Ad Veltman came into the barn in a very excited state telling the men that the Germans were searching all yards, barns, and stables in the village for horses. Ad said that, hopefully, all the Germans would do was come in, look around, and, not seeing any horses, they would leave quickly.

Indeed shortly afterwards a German patrol came and stopped right in front of the café. A number of German officers entered the yard and walked straight to the barn. The men inside had received sufficient warning and had cleared up everything and retreated to the loft by means of a ladder, pulling it up behind them. They then lay flat on the floor between chairs and brushwood with their weapons at the ready, waiting with baited breath for what would happen next. The German officers entered the barn followed by the Klerks sisters who remained standing in the doorway. The Germans looked around but, seeing there were no horses (just a pig and a few rabbits), became rather annoyed, shouting and pointing at the attic. One of the sisters shook her head and answered calmly and firmly. To everyone's relief the Germans left. The soldiers later heard from the sisters that indeed the Germans had been quite frustrated and during the conversation they had insisted on a ladder to search the loft – but luckily no ladder could be found.

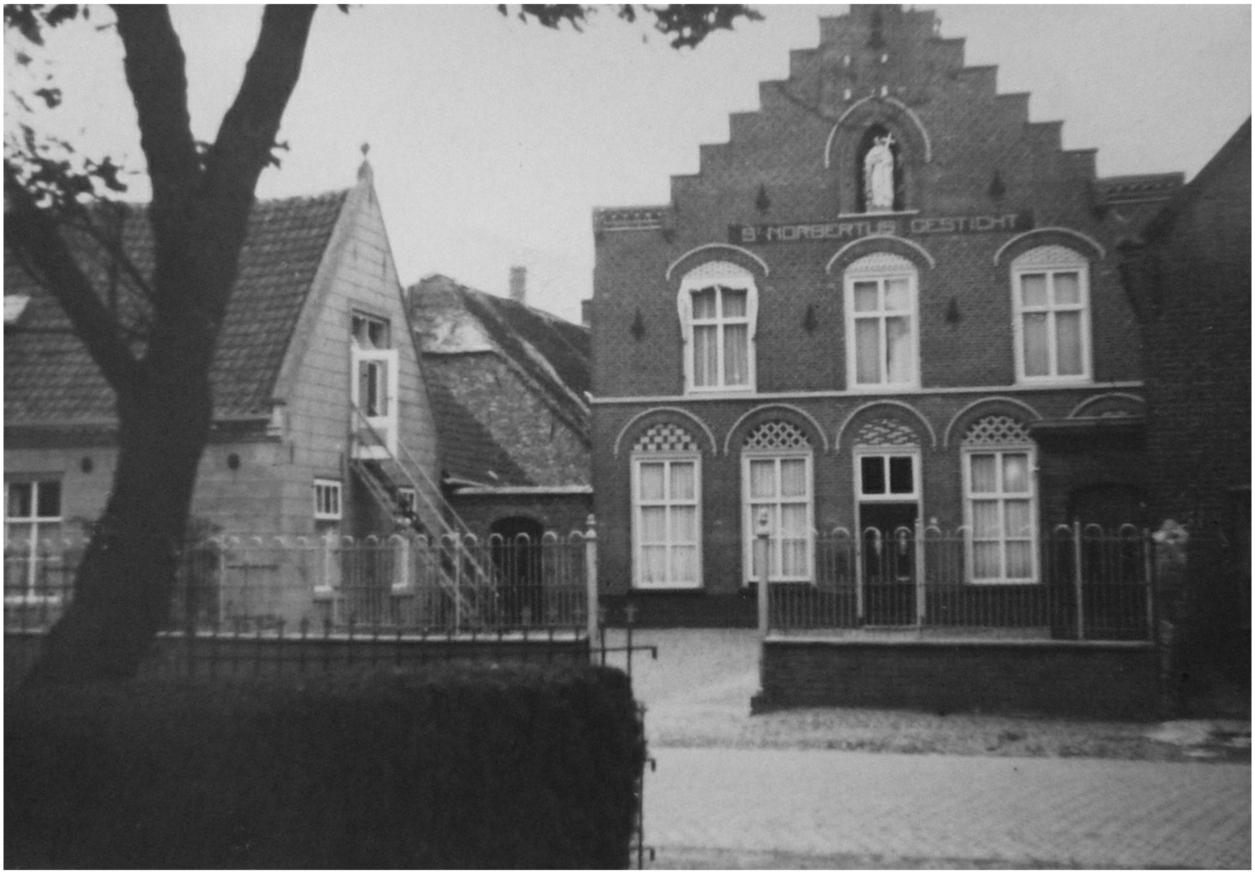
To the Sint Norbertus institution

The risk that the Germans would be billeted at the café increased daily, especially as SS-troops were reported to have stayed at a neighbor’s house for two nights. The barn and the farmhouse, used as a home as well as a hostel and café, would be an ideal place to lodge a considerable number of German troops. Children in the vicinity had also spoken to the Klerk sisters about voices that came from the barn, so it was imperative that another shelter had to be found for the Staffords quickly.

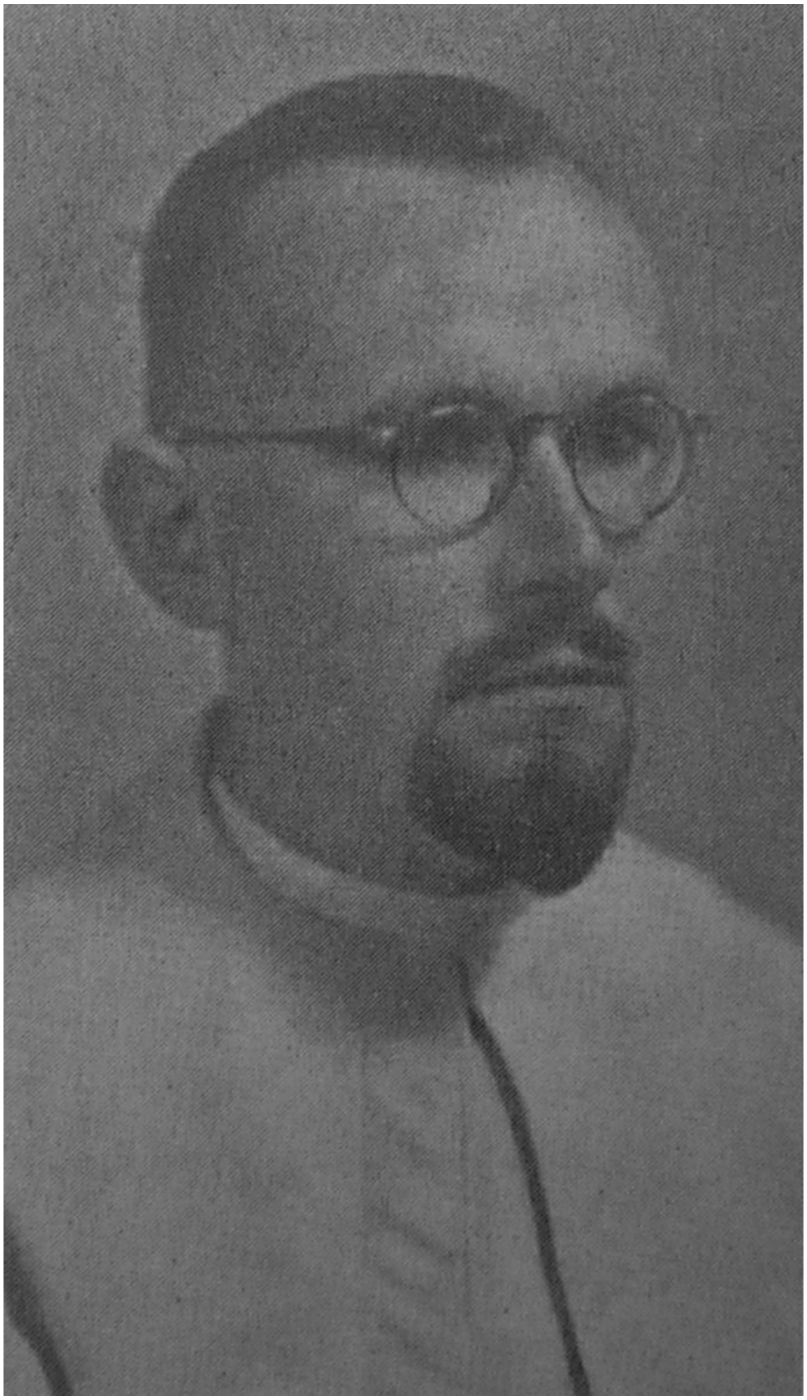
It took a lot of effort to find a hiding-place large enough to house such a large group of men. The Veltman group had considered a variety of options. The first was the vacant castle d’Oultremont situated between Drunen and Nieuwkuijk, but this idea was soon abandoned as this castle was considered too inviting for the Germans. Its location in the forests and the difficulty for it to be observed from the air made it a perfect place to serve as a German storage point or shelter for their troops. Furthermore, a large family lived in the immediate vicinity whose safety could not be guaranteed and a lot of children used to play in the neighborhood. Food supply would also become an enormous problem. Another idea was to accommodate the men in duck decoys located in the polder. These decoys were used to trap wild ducks for consumption. That idea was soon rejected as well, so just one option remained: the psychiatric institution Sint Norbertus, in nearby Elshout. This belonged to the Roman Catholic Congregation of the Brothers of Elshout and was not far from the present hiding-place, opposite the church in Elshout.

In the afternoon of September 23, Ad Veltman went to see the Father Superior of the institution, Gilbertus Rusman. He was willing to cooperate but stated that there were 125 patients in the building occupying all the halls and rooms, and he considered it too risky and irresponsible for both the patients and the Brothers. However, together they toured the building, including the attic where a number of the Brothers had their chambers. Veltman felt that if these Brothers could be located elsewhere and an additional bed placed in each room, plus another six beds in the corridor, there would be sufficient room for 28 men.

Father Superior agreed with this suggestion but stated that he was not allowed to make the final decision himself, and that he needed the approval of his superior, Rector Cornelis van Zeeland. He also thought it a good idea but, just like Father Superior Rusman, he considered it rather dangerous too. The patients as well as the Brothers would be in danger if the Germans became aware of the soldiers. Constable Henk Stooter was summoned and consulted on the matter, and he managed to persuade the rector that it would be safe for the men to hide there. Being responsible for the whole institute the rector indicated that he would also accept responsibility for the entire group. Furthermore he would immediately set everything in motion to arrange for the sleeping-places and food supply. It was agreed that the soldiers would depart their current hiding place after sunset and arrive at the institution at about 11pm that night.


St NORBERTUS GESTICHT

The Sint Norbertus institution in the Kerkstraat in Elshout. (A.A.M. Veltman)



The rector of the Sint Norbertus institution, Cornelis van Zeeland. (A.A.M. Veltman)

The Father Superior of the Sint Norbertus institution, Gilbertus Rusman. (A.A.M. Veltman)

Lt Sharp was informed of the plan and shown the location of their new hiding place on a map. After Henk Stooter, Ad Veltman, and Leo and David Elshout had explored the surroundings of the institution, it was decided that the group should take the shortest route to the building via the Kerkstraat. At the barn the soldiers assembled in the dark in the courtyard for a quick final inspection by candlelight. Every soldier had one or two loaves of bread under his coat. A supply of butter, cheese, and bacon had also been distributed amongst them. The Klerks sisters' radio also went with them.

In stockinged feet, with their boots hanging around their necks, they went along the Kerkstraat to their new hiding-place. Henk Stooter walked ahead to intercept any German patrols. Ad Veltman headed the group and David

Elshout followed up at the rear. Leo Elshout followed a little farther behind in order to intercept any Germans that might try to follow them.

All went well and although their cutlery made a rattling noise the group arrived safely without problem at the Sint Norbertus institution at the agreed time where Father Superior Rusman and Rector van Zeeland were waiting for them. In a short time everyone had found themselves a bed in the attic. Although there was little space for the 27 men (Weate was to join them later), it was comfortable enough and everything looked tidy. There were sufficient beds and clean sheets had been provided. Ad Veltman and his men could return home well pleased with the successful outcome of the undertaking.

The next morning, Sunday September 24, it turned out that the movement of the British soldiers had not gone by unnoticed by the villagers. Soon it was rumoured that a large group of demoralised Germans, retreating from the front, had been seen stealing through the village in their stockinged feet for fear of drawing attention to themselves.

That Sunday Ad Veltman and David Elshout cycled to the hospital in Waalwijk to find out how Pte Charlie Weate was doing. They were told that Weate was sufficiently recovered to return with them. Not expecting him to be ready so soon nothing had been arranged for his return trip and no extra bicycle was available. Finally Sister Superior agreed to lend them her bicycle so the three men were able to return to Elshout.

When they approached the railway bridge across Baardwijkse Overlaat in Waalwijk they found that a large group of civilians had gathered there and they could not continue. Soon the reason for this delay became apparent; the Germans were blowing up the railway bridge to aid their retreat. The three decided to wait instead of taking an alternative route, and once the bridge was blown with a series of explosives, the three men continued their journey. Pte Weate could relax once more. Seeing those Germans had scared him out of his wits and he had felt his heart beating in his throat. After arriving in Elshout safely Ad Veltman took him to the institution and the Stafford group was again complete.

The demolished railway bridge across the Baardwijkse Overlaat between Waalwijk and Drunen. (Heemkunde van de Oostelijke Langstraat)

Meanwhile, supplying food for the 19 evaders in Drunen and the 28 in Elshout was becoming increasingly difficult and a solution had to be found. To provide their daily bread alone at least 35kg of flour was required. The Staffords in Elshout consumed more than 3lb of butter, quite a lot of sugar, jam, meat, and liters of milk. David Elshout contacted Wim Meyers of the André group for help. He worked at the rationing office in Waalwijk and organized the supply of 48 ration cards for food. He also got permission from the representative of the food commission to buy a pig to be slaughtered for the men.

Godefridus Visser from Drunen also undertook to supply food for the Elshout group, while Ad Veltman was able to arrange substantial quantities of milk and butter via the manager of the local dairy. Every day the milk was taken to the Sint Norbertus institution by Frans Spierings who lived in Elshout. The funding was in part supplied by Godefridus Visser while the rest was advanced by Ad Veltman. The André group was able to refund part of this generous donation to both men with money donated by Mr Wagenberg from the town of Heusden.

After Charlie Wheate had been taken back to his comrades in Elshout, German vehicles had entered Drunen during the morning. The German soldiers were billeted in the parochial boy’s school close to where the American and British airborne troops were hiding. It was rumoured that the German soldiers were only the vanguard of a whole battalion that was to be stationed at Drunen.

The arrival of these Germans did not appear to unsettle the British too much, but the Americans, on the other hand, became rather agitated. They immediately took up their weapons and were ready to give the Germans a very hot welcome should they knock at the door. With some effort the Fathers were able to calm them down by persuading them to help disguise the building in an attempt to prevent possible German billeting there. The schools in Drunen had been vacated during the past fortnight and the furniture was stored at the Dominican monastery. The men placed the benches and tables in front of the windows and doors in such a way that, from the outside, it looked as though the building was brim-full of school furniture, so no room for German soldiers! A narrow corridor ran from the theater hall along a blind wall to the dormitory of the students, now the abode of the airborne troops. At the end of this corridor, and barely visible from the outside, was an American soldier who usually stood guard there with his weapon on a chair at the ready. In the recreation room a British had put a blackboard on top of the benches in order to prevent any view from the back of the theater.

After a couple of hour's hard work the camouflage was completed. The Americans had not quite settled down yet and had even put guards at the toilets. At one time Sgt Moukad, his weapon slung on his shoulder, entered the kitchen where the fathers were doing the dishes. He had not come to help but, instead, asked the fathers to leave the building saying, “When the Germans are coming we are going to do something, you understand?” The Fathers understood quite well, but did not respond to his request. Towards evening the anxiety had subsided to a calm wait. The Americans withdrew their guards and relied on the vigilance of the Dominican Fathers. It was agreed that a Dominican brother would continuously stand guard at the gate ready to intercept any possible bold Druneners or rude Germans and raise the alarm in case of danger.

S/Sgt Vaught understood the situation of the Dominican Fathers and the dangerous and distressful position they were now in. In order to safeguard them from potential prosecution in case of a German raid, he wrote a letter for them stating that the Americans and the British had forced the Dominicans to give them shelter and had taken them hostage to prevent them from betraying them. Notwithstanding his noble intentions, the Dominicans did not have any illusions that this statement would give them much help when needed.

The soldiers were now very wary and at every unusual noise they switched off the lights and kept a deathly silence, until the Fathers uttered the words “all safe.” As the days passed the situation for the Fathers, the Americans, and British evaders in the former girls’ vicarage became increasingly dangerous. The hiding place of the troops had somehow become known in the village and because of the ever growing number of German soldiers in Drunen the risk of hiding in the building of the Dominican Fathers was constantly increasing. In consultation with the Veltman group it was decided that the group had to be accommodated somewhere else as soon as possible.

Despite the fact that there was barely any space left in the Sint Norbertus institution, it was nevertheless decided that the 15 Americans would be accommodated there. Every tiny attic bedroom had a small space behind a partition which could be utilised as sleeping accommodation. After consultation with Rector Van Zeeland it was decided that the Americans would be transferred to the institution in the night of September 27/28. The four British soldiers would be temporarily accommodated in Godefridus Visser’s house in Drunen.

The original plan was that at 1am, Leo and David Elshout were to accompany the four British to Godfridus’ home while Henk Stooter and Ad Veltman would take the Americans to Elshout. In the event everything would run differently because the Germans were patrolling heavily in Drunen and Visser’s house could not be reached. The four British had nowhere else to go so it was decided to also take them to the institution in Elshout. The Americans arrived at the institution after a difficult trip, late at 3am and shortly afterwards the four British joined them.

Despite the well-organized food supply, problems arose regularly. Because so many mouths had to be fed it was often difficult to find enough to eat. There was, however, no shortage of tobacco because it was provided by cigar maker Wim van Liempt from Elshout, and was smoked in pipes that had been supplied by Henk Stooter. This tobacco was rather pungent and gave the men sore throats. The provisions were taken as discretely as possible during the daytime to Ad Veltman’s house and from there, in the evening, taken by Ad and others on bicycles or on foot to the institution. The men took their meals as often as possible in the refectory of the Brothers rather than in the small rooms of the attic.

The refectory of the Brothers, where meals were taken and eaten. (A.A.M. Veltman)

Because Henk Stooter was a member of the constabulary and had permission to stay out beyond the 8pm curfew he surveyed the route during the evening, prior to a food transport to the Sint Norbertus. If there was any danger he would signal with his torch. Once it happened that after the curfew the resistance men were stopped by a German patrol of six men. The officer in charge asked them whether that food on their bikes wasn't by chance for the black market. The men denied this, saying that the food was for themselves. One of the men, trying to bail them out of the tricky situation, offered the officer a pot of jam whereupon another said: “there are six of them, give them six.” The officer wanted none of it, replying “Nicht ein und auch kein sechs” (not one and neither six). He wished them “Guten Abend” (good night) and ordered them to carry on.

Despite the occasional lack of rations with just a little sugar and a few apples, the airborne troops were generally well cared for. When at night their helpers arrived with the food there were only happy faces. Sometimes Leo Elshout came by at night to bring the men a few boiled eggs or some locally distilled alcohol. When the Germans had set a curfew time in the early evening it was sometimes even pre-arranged that Leo Elshout would come to the institution disguised in a German uniform to prevent attracting attention if he would be spotted by any Germans. To avoid being attacked by the evaders, they were of course preinformed of Leo’s disguise.

Despite the constant danger in which the troops and those around them found themselves, the mood was fairly good. Occasionally there were some mutual irritations, but that was inevitable with so many people in such a confined area. The men played dominoes, card games, or sometimes chess. They read English novels and occasionally listened to the BBC news on the Klerks sisters’ hidden radio. However, the troops, who were fit and well trained, had little exercise and after a while some of them had to adjust their belts to allow a little more room.

Much attention was paid to personal hygiene. In the evening and at night when the other residents were asleep, the men could use the showers or the large bath in the bathroom which was a welcome diversion. This bathroom was outside in a separate building in a small courtyard. Showering was an altogether different story. On the left of the tiled room there were four showers with a wooden bench where one could sit and wash one’s feet. After lathering someone else would then rinse him with tepid water from a bucket. The institution also owned an electric laundry and a drying room where most of the uniforms could be washed. What remained was laundered at Godefridus Visser's home in Drunen.

The showers and bath in the bathroom at the Sint Norbertus Institution. (A.A.M. Veltman)

In the period that followed more and more German units passed through Elshout and the surrounding villages on their way to the north. As the number of German troops in the immediate vicinity increased so did the risk of Germans being billeted in the institution. From the outset there had been a continuing search for another safe place to accommodate the large group of airborne evaders, but regrettably without success. However, this was about to change.

Chapter 5

A NEW HIDING PLACE

To the Pesterd farmstead

In the morning of October 14, a large group of Germans entered Elshout and established themselves around the institution. It seemed that the headquarters of the German Luftwaffe was to set up their command post in Elshout. A vacant house in the street was fitted out as a telephone exchange and a little further on they placed a large radio communications truck. In the garden German troops were busily engaged in digging a trench system. To the horror of all the residents at the institution there was an impatient banging on the doors around 11am. The Allied troops inside had already planned ahead should the enemy decide to visit the institution one day and were ready in position at the top of the stairs to give the Germans a warm welcome. Downstairs they could hear numerous German voices entering the hall and, from their footsteps, it was clear that they were standing at the bottom of the winding staircase. They heard Father Superior Rusman speak to the Germans in a soft but firm voice. For a while there was no sound and then, to everybody's relief, they heard the footsteps leave the hall.

Later, after the Germans' departure, Rusman explained that the previous night he had been warned by the resistance that a visit could be expected from the Germans. He and Ad Veltman had devised a plan to mislead the Germans and ensure they would not stay. He told the Germans that there were patients upstairs suffering from diphtheria, and to give credibility to this story they had hung a warning sign at the bottom of the stairs, obtained from a local hospital. The Germans, fearful of the disease, had believed the story. Nevertheless, they did demand occupation of that part of the building where the kitchens were located, in order for them to prepare their own meals there.

Forced to work in the same place as the Germans, the cook of the institution, Brother Isfridus Meert, tried to make the best of it. Soon he got on quite well with one of the German cooks and managed to arrange for some German cigarettes to be obtained. Under some pretext he stole about 200 cigarettes from the stores and took them up to the troops. He even managed to get the German cooks to peel some extra potatoes for him which he not only gave to the patients but also shared with the airborne troops in the attic.

The kitchen of the Brothers (A.A.M. Veltman)

The staircase leading to the attic of the Sint Norbertus Institution (A.A.M. Veltman)

The toilets and washing facilities used by the men were on the ground floor. In order to prevent the German soldiers from seeing the airborne troops in their uniforms when they came down to use the toilet or washroom, they dressed as Brothers. The door leading to the stairs was in the same corridor as that to the library and reception room as well as the kitchen, where the Germans stayed. Before any airborne troops came down a Brother would pretend to be cleaning the bannister, all the while checking to see if it was safe. If there were no Germans around he would give a signal and the men would come down, cautiously, in their cassocks. Gradually the situation became perilous and there was great anxiety that the troops in the attic would be discovered. The situation was becoming untenable. One of the Brothers could not cope with the pressure and was moved to ’s-Hertogenbosch. A solution had to be found and quickly.

The cook of the Sint Norbertus Institution, Brother Isfridus Meert (A.A.M. Veltman)

Over the next day and night the group Veltman started a thorough reconnaissance of the area, exploring the surrounding villages and the Loonse en Drunense duinen to discover the current situation regarding the disposition of German troops in the area. At the same time they were looking for new hiding places for the airborne troops. Meanwhile, the Sint Norbertus institution proved to be almost totally surrounded by Germans so that, in theory, escape would be impossible. As had been expected, the Germans had already started to use the vacant castle d’Oultremont, between Drunen and Nieuwkuijk, as an ammunition-depot. They were also using the duck decoys in the polder and there was no other place that could serve as a hiding place for the large group of airborne evaders.

That night an urgent consultation took place between Rector Van Zeeland, Father Superior Gilbertus Rusman, the resistance men, Lt Sharp, and S/ Sgt Vaught. The ever-increasing risk of being discovered necessitated the immediate departure of the troops from the institution. With the agreement that the following day the men would be informed about their new destination, the resistance men left the attic.

The Pesterd

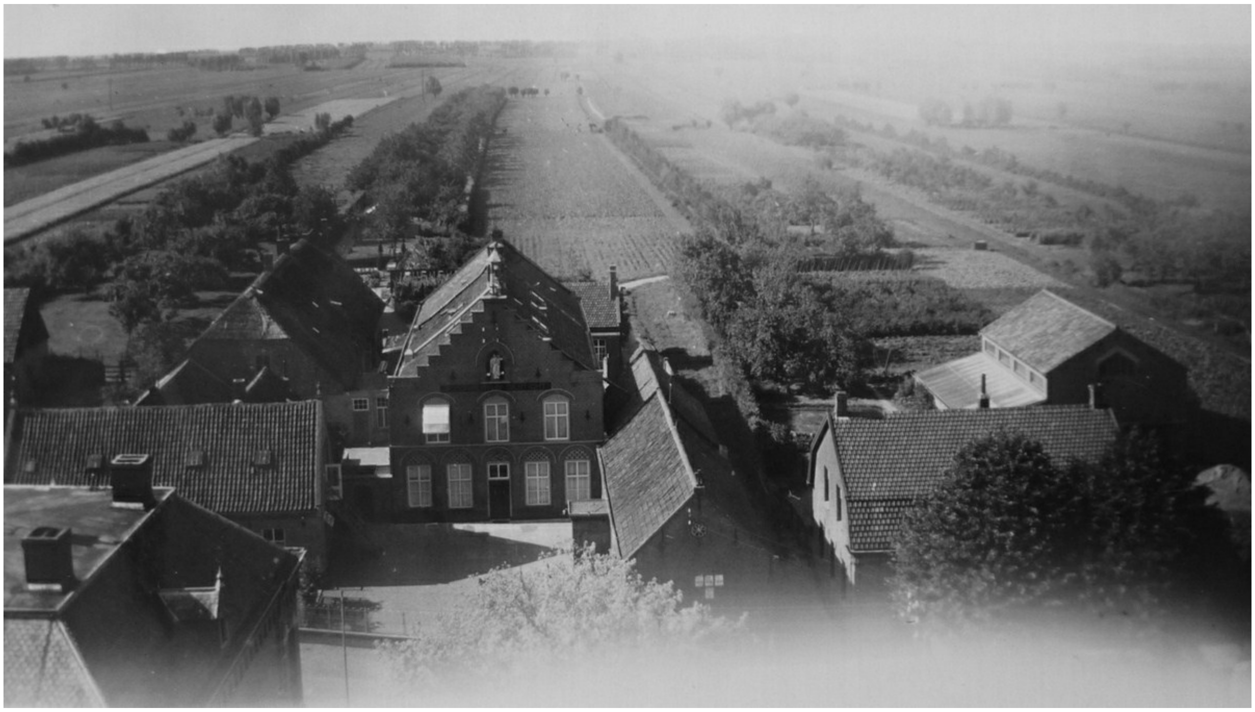
The next day, October 16, the group made plans to leave that night between 7 and 8pm. This hour window had been chosen based on observations of the Germans: at 8pm a sentry was posted near the building, who patrolled 220 yards (200m) to the east and 220 yards (200m) to the west. Furthermore it got dark at 7pm and the curfew came into place at 8 after which nobody was allowed to be outside.

Whenever the resistance men examined the map to identify another hiding place, the area surrounding Loonse en Drunense duinen came into the picture. However, the major problem was how to get there since they would have to cross one of the bridges across the Afwaterings Canal that the Germans had started to guard. This canal ran from ’s-Hertogenbosch to Drongelen and passed the Loonse en Drunense duinen on its northern side. These bridges were all mined and they were guarded, night and day, by the Germans who also patrolled from one bridge to the other. During the daytime they let people pass without problems but, because of the curfew, any attempted crossing presented an enormous risk after 8pm.

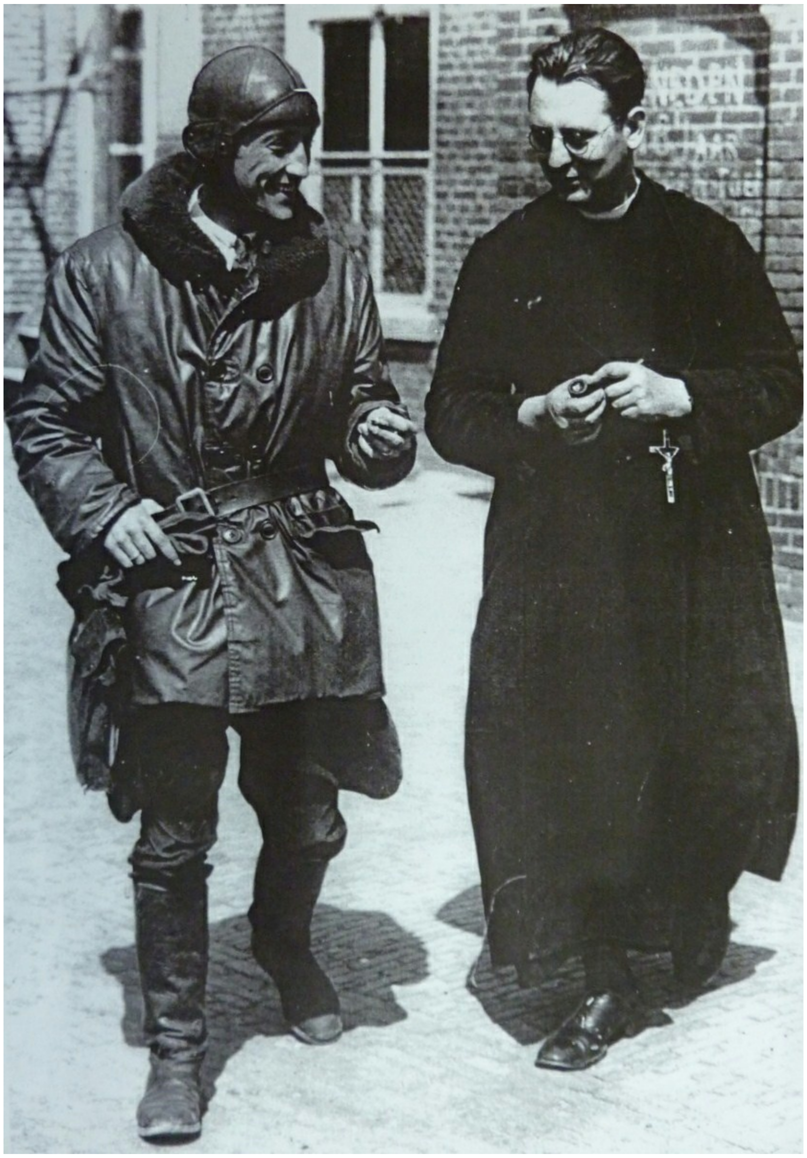
That afternoon Ad Veltman and Leo Elshout, after spending hours in the Loonse en Drunense duinen trying to find a potential hiding place, arrived at the hamlet of Giersbergen. Here they were told that the place had been plundered in recent days by German troops who had come from the direction of Udenhout and had passed through on their way to Drunen. They had taken away a large number of cattle and other items and nothing much remained. This gave the two men an idea. They walked about 1.2 miles (2km) to the west to the small settlement of the Pesterd. Here stood an old farmstead named the Pesterd, with a barn and small bake house, where Jan and Sien Van Kempen and their two small sons, Willie and Piet, lived.

Jan van Kempen had previously hidden people on his farm, and Veltman and Elshout started a conversation that soon led to the heart of the matter. They told Van Kempen about the large group of airborne troops and their search for a suitable hiding place for them. Jan was ready to help and said that they could stay in the large barn that was filled with hay. Veltman and Elshout agreed with Jan that the group would be brought there that same night before midnight. They then returned to Drunen to devise a plan for that night.

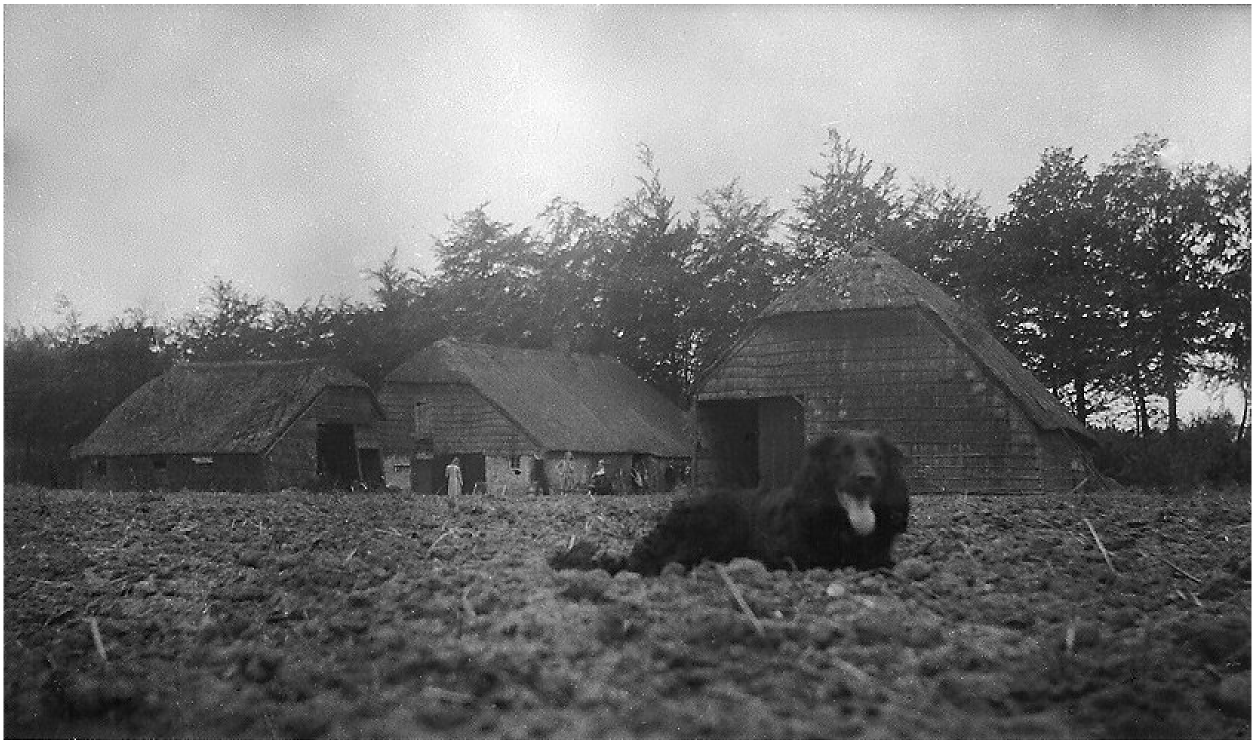
According to the plan, the airborne troops were to leave the institution one by one, through the rear of the building, and assemble in the polder. Then the group would first travel north and then branch off to the south to head for Drunen. A spot was identified where the main road was to be crossed and who was to do precisely what. Having arrived at the Afwaterings Canal Henk Stooter, the policeman, would reconnoitre the bridge that had to be crossed in order to reach the safety of the forest and, beyond, the farmstead. The four resistance men would again be involved in the journey. Everyone was to be ready at 7pm that evening.



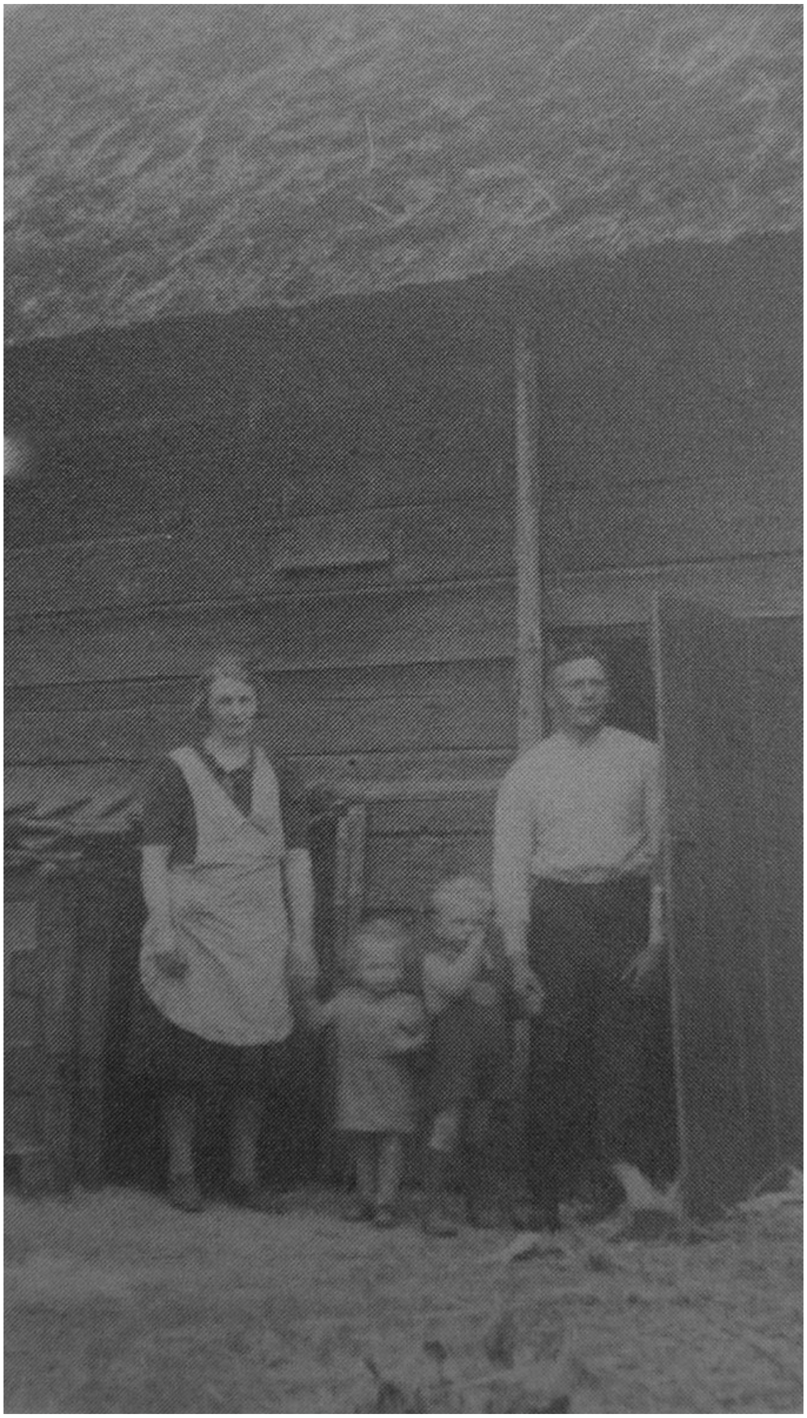
The view on the Sint Norbertus institution and the polder behind it from the church opposite the building. In the attic of this institution the airborne troops had been hiding (A.A.M. Veltman)



Ad Veltman together with a brother in front of the Sint Norbertus institution. The picture was taken after the war. (A.A.M. Veltman)



A picture of farmstead the Pesterd of Jan van Kempen, in the small settlement of the Pesterd. The picture was taken after the war. The dog belonged to Ad Veltman and was called Sciepa. (A.A.M. Veltman)



The Van Kempen family in the Pesterd. Farmer Jan, his wife Sien, and their small sons Willie and Piet (A.A.M. Veltman)

However, what they did not know was that a German general had arrived in Elshout that day, causing the German surveillance to be stepped up considerably. The four men soon learned that instead of one sentry there were now three at the institution, patrolling extensively. Instead of coming on duty at 8pm the German sentries now commenced their guard at 7 – the first stage of the plan to get out of Elshout almost went awry but the men remained calm and again studied the map to find an alternative route.

When the resistance men arrived at the institution it transpired that the German cooks had left for the town of Gorinchem that evening to stock up on supplies and would return later that night. This gave the troops a chance to get ready on the ground floor of the building. They were lined up and inspected by their officers and NCOs, all wearing socks over their army boots so as to make as little noise as possible. The South Staffords were to go ahead, followed by the British glider pilots together with the artillerymen, Sgt Leahy, and L/Bdr Buckley. The Americans were to follow on behind. When it was considered safe outside, with the German sentry out of sight, the troops and their helpers left the institution one by one through the rear of the building, walking through the back gardens to the polder. Brother Aloises Hoogervorst was to accompany the group.

In the meantime it had become pitch-dark outside and there was a strong wind blowing; the men had great difficulty keeping up with Brother Hoogervorst. He had started off so fast that a number of men quickly lost sight of him and soon went astray, ending up in the middle of some gardens. One soldier ran into a hedge knocking over, with a loud clattering noise, a bicycle that had been leaned against it. The men thought their last hour had come but the Brother quickly found these wanderers and led them along a path and open fields towards the north.

After all the men were together again, Brother Hoogervorst went ahead to inspect the route. The group advanced slowly through the polder, stopping regularly to check that they were still on the correct route. At one of these stops Hoogervorst returned to the group from up ahead and said that he was not going any further. He had reconnoitred the route and a bit further on had seen, in the corner of a field, a German antiaircraft battery. This had unnerved him and he decided to return to the institution, abandoning the group. After some hesitation the journey was, nevertheless, resumed, and 220 yards (200m) before reaching the battery the group veered off to the left and then turned northwards. Many small ditches and bridges were crossed and after about an hour, to the obvious delight of the troops, the route finally changed to the south in the direction of the Loonse en Drunense duinen.

After a while the group reached a wide ditch where there was supposed to be a small footbridge, they searched for it in the dark but when it was finally found it they discovered it had been demolished – although during a reconnaissance some days earlier it had been intact. At first it seemed that they could not continue due to all the water to the left and right of them, and neither could they go back because of the German troops and the antiaircraft battery. Eventually it was decided that there was no alternative but to wade through the ditch, and they arrived on the other side soaked to the skin. When the group was complete again they continued their journey.

Wet and weary they carried on through fields, over barbed wire, and through ditches until after about an hour they were suddenly startled by the droning sound of approaching aircraft. All of a sudden the aircraft dropped flares over the polder, brightly illuminating up the whole area. The men dived to the ground and hid next to a large haystack in a field. Since there was a bridge nearby that could aid the German retreat over the Bergsche Maas near the village of Heusden, it was thought that the plane was an Allied aircraft on a mission to bomb the bridge. When the light had subsided and it was dark again they listened to the sound of aircraft disappear into the distance and carefully proceeded through back gardens until they arrived at a main road which ran through Drunen. They had now been on the road for almost three hours and had travelled less than half a mile, as the crow flies, from their starting point in Elshout. After Henk Stooter and Leo Elshout had surveyed the road and the surroundings, the group carried on, crossed the road, and walked southwards past Drunen to the bridge over the Afwaterings Canal.

Without being noticed by any of the hundreds of Germans billeted in Drunen, the group managed to reach the Afwaterings Canal. Here the heavily loaded, drenched, and worn out airborne troops and their helpers took some time out to rest a while. Henk Stooter went ahead to the bridge to survey it. All looked quiet and while keeping an alert eye on the surroundings, Ad Veltman and six airborne troops moved towards the bridge in order to occupy it. All looked safe and there were no Germans in sight. They secured the road to and from the bridge while the rest quickly passed over it and disappeared into the forest on their way to the Pesterd.

Everything was going to plan, well beyond expectations, and the group of 47 airborne troops and their four helpers continued on towards their new hiding place. On the way, crossing some open fields, the men had to seek cover a number of times when, for no obvious reason, flares were dropped again. After a long and laborious march that normally would have taken but a few hours, the men arrived at Jan van Kempen’s farmstead after a seven hour walk, wet, cold, and exhausted. As is was beyond their expected arrival time, Van Kempen had already gone to bed, not expecting the group to appear that night anymore. It was 2am when the men finally entered the barn and flopped down onto the straw. Lt Sharp woke up Van Kempen and arranged for him to provide something to eat and drink for the men inside the barn.

Sgt Ernest Cutforth suggested to Lt Sharp that he should undertake a reconnaissance towards the British frontline, south of Boxtel, that same night. According to the latest radio news, this frontline should not be that far from their present location. It was therefore agreed that Sgt Cutforth, together with a second South Stafford, would leave at once and would report back within three days. It would be a dangerous journey and the three mapped out a route. Provided with a compass and a number of morphine syringes, Sgt Cutforth and Pte E. Tams set off on their journey at 3am. They left the Pesterd and crossed the Loonse en Drunense duinen heading towards the frontline to the southeast.

By the following morning, October 17, three of the four men of the resistance, Henk Stooter and Leo and David Elshout, had safely returned to Drunen. Ad Veltman had stayed behind to assist Van Kempen with his guests. During the daytime the troops would now stay hidden, about 110 yards (100m) from the farmstead in the relative safety of the thick forest. Their hideout was located at the edge of a pasture, surrounded by an impenetrable hedge of brambles and thorns, and trees growing so close together that they effectively made a timber wall. About 55 yards (50m) further on, behind the trees, the men dug shelters, covered with small tree trunks and tarpaulin, topped with turf and branches. In the evening the men would return to the farmstead to stay in the relative comfort of the barn for the night, where they slept on the straw. In the old bake house two British cooks, dressed in overalls, prepared the meals for the rest of the group.

The interior of the barn of the Pesterd farmstead where the men stayed during the night. (A.A.M. Veltman)

The bake house of farmstead, where the two British cooks prepared the meals. (A.A.M. Veltman)

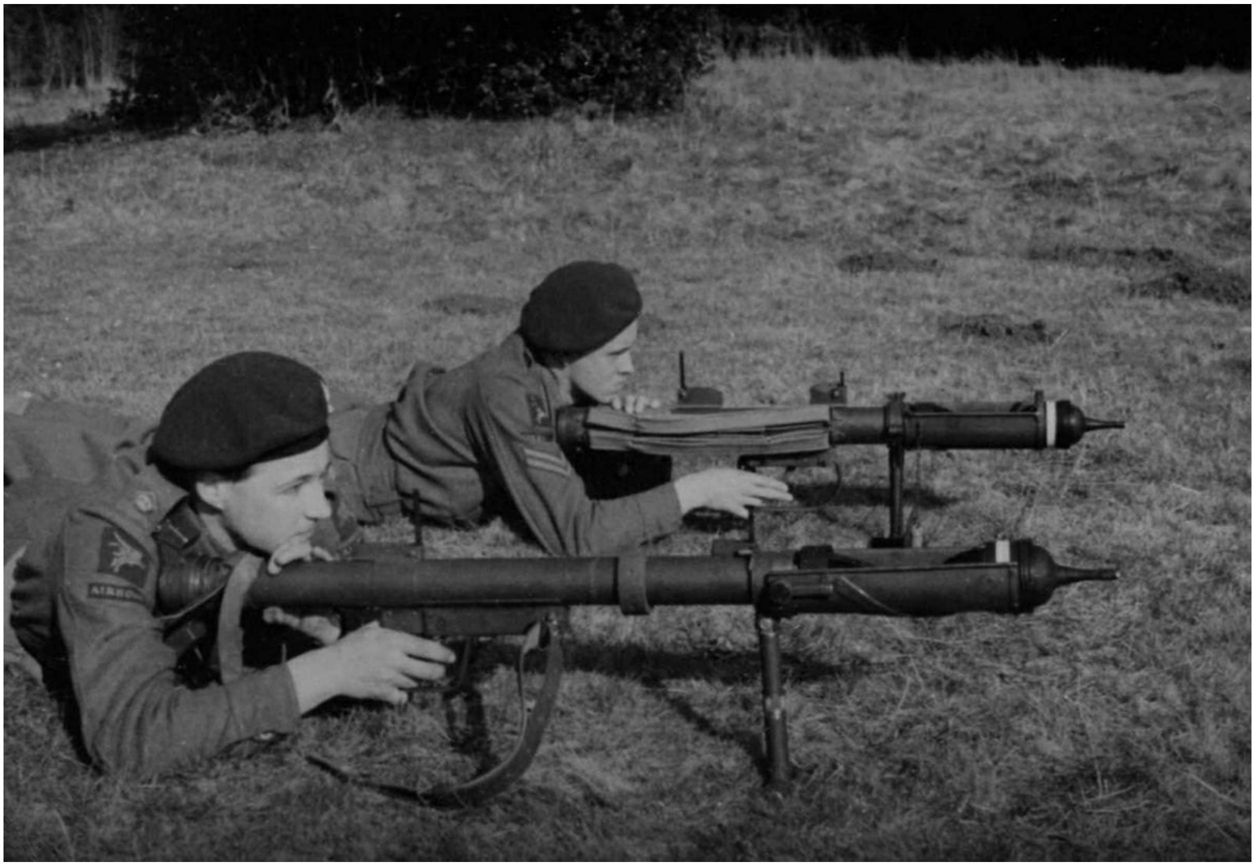
Father Superior Gilbertus Rusman from Elshout provided 50 blankets that were taken to the Pesterd by Leo and David Elshout in a cargo tricycle with enclosed box mounted between the two front wheels. Victuals and other requirements were collected in Drunen by Jan van Kempen with a horse and cart. A pony with trailer belonging to Godefridus Visser from Drunen was also used and deployed for urgent matters such as transporting various tools or food previously prepared at his house.

An ammunition case with three PIAT antitank grenades had been forgotten and left behind in Elshout but it was now required by Lt Sharp. The group still carried their PIAT in case it was required. It was agreed that Henk Stooter and Ad Veltman would go and fetch the case with the grenades and bring them to the barn by bicycle. Henk Stooter departed at 6pm to get the ammunition case while Ad Veltman went to reconnoitre the route that they were to follow. However, when he arrived at the Afwaterings Canal, Veltman was stopped at the bridge by a German sentry and ordered to hand over his bicycle. This delay was most unwelcome, particularly since Henk Stooter would soon be arriving at the bridge on his bicycle too. Veltman pondered how to go about the situation and decided to make a fuss about being in the possession of a declaration of urgency (a written declaration in German explaining that he needed his bicycle for his daily work) for the use of his bicycle. So, he demanded to see the commander who, as he knew, was located in a wooden shed some distance away. As he had hoped, the sentry told Veltman to accompany him to the shed, but when they entered, the commander appeared not to be present. Instead there was another German soldier who was introduced to Veltman as the one now being in charge. Despite his papers, Veltman was ordered to surrender his bicycle because the soldier in question needed a good bicycle to go to the front that same evening. Veltman received a broken down ladies bicycle in return that they assured him would be exchanged against his own the following morning.

This diversion had taken at least 20 minutes, during which time no German sentry had been present on the bridge. This gave Henk Stooter the opportunity to safely cross the canal with the grenades. As was to be expected, the bicycle re-exchange never materialized as the following morning there was another sentry at the bridge who claimed to know nothing about any such arrangement, and Ad Veltman never saw his bicycle again.

In the meantime the number of Germans in the area continued to increase and even Russian prisoners of war were seen. Every day those prisoners were taken into the dunes and along the main roads under the watchful eyes of German soldiers and officers to do compulsory work digging defensive positions and foxholes.

For the time being the airborne troops had an excellent accommodation in the farmstead at the Pesterd, but it remained a question just for how long that situation would remain.



The British major, Norman Field, demonstrating the PIAT’s capabilities. (Richard Field via Tom Sykes)

Chapter 6

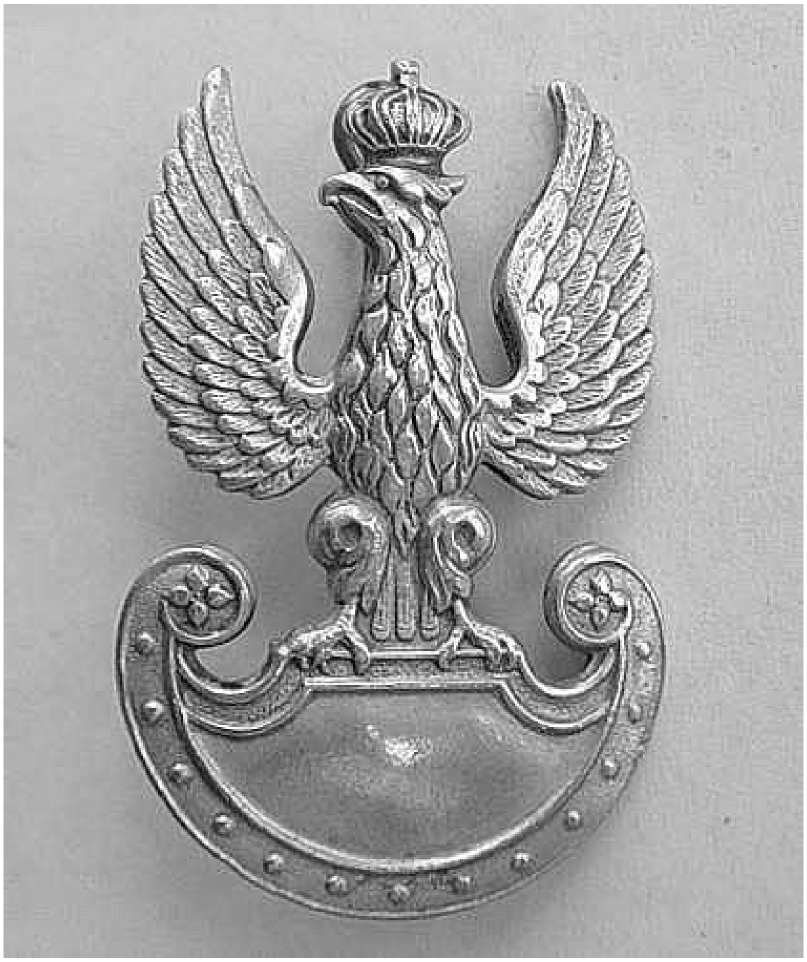
PREMATURE LANDINGS NEAR BIEZENMORTEL AND BERGENSHUIZEN

Escaping in the direction of Arnhem

From September 17 onwards, a number of other gliders made premature landings, but these took place more to the south of the Loonse en Drunense duinen. Several of those gliders, for various reasons, came down north of the line Oisterwijk-Boxtel, mostly landed in areas to the north and east of the Kampina forest. The occupants of the gliders did their best to stay out of the hands of the enemy, and, as in the case of the premature glider landings at the Loonse en Drunense duinen, there were also several locals together with men and women of the Dutch resistance movement who came to the aid of these stranded airborne troops. They were, whether organized or not, ready to take great personal risks by helping these troops to avoid capture by the Germans, and guiding them to, or providing them with, safe hiding places.

One of the gliders that landed on the first day of Operation *Market Garden*, came down quite a distance to the south of the Loonse en Drunense duinen – and was another British Horsa glider. That morning the glider had taken off from RAF Keevil, in Wiltshire, for a flight to landing-zone Z located between Wolfheze and Heelsum. The glider was piloted by two British pilots, S/ Sgt W. Cram and Sgt James Whitehead.

The Horsa glider, which had Chalk Number 478 painted onto the fuselage, carried two Jeeps and four airborne troops from the Headquarters of the British 1st Airborne Division. These included 29-year-old Polish liaison officer, 2/Lt Janusz Szegda of the 1st Independent Polish Parachute Brigade, the Dutch Commando Sgt Klaas Luitwieler, member of the No.2 (Dutch) Troop No.10 (Inter-Allied) Commando, and two British RASC (Royal Army Service Corps) drivers for the Jeeps, L/ Cpl Kenneth Barnard and Dvr Bill Eccleton.



Cap badge of the 1st Independent Polish Parachutist Brigade.

Patch No.2 (Dutch) Troop No.10 (Inter-Allied) Commando.

From England the Horsa glider flew some dozens of yards behind its tug among the vast stream of other tug and glider aircraft. Via the northern supply route, the armada safely reached the Dutch coast, but after Schouwen-Duiveland had been passed, German antiaircraft fire was encountered for the first time near Roosendaal. While the landscape slipped by below and only sporadic German antiaircraft fire was received, the planes, at a medium altitude, passed Breda and were nearing Tilburg.

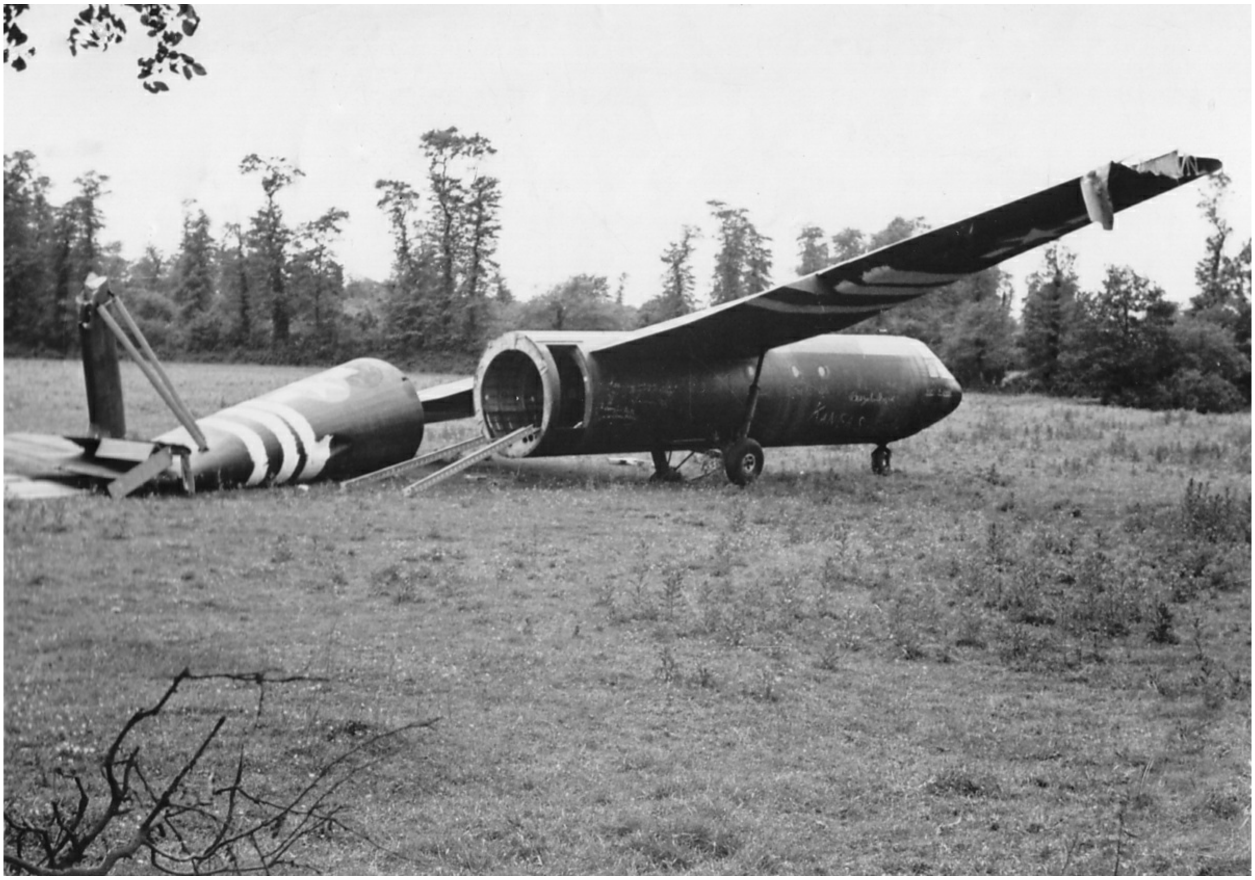
It was about 2pm and, so far, nothing special had happened. Having passed Tilburg Crams' tug pilot flew directly through a column of dense cloud instead of avoiding it, causing Cram to lose sight of his tug. Once out of the cloud he realized that his glider was flying higher and dangerously close the tug aircraft. This meant that there was a danger of the two crashing, and in order to avoid that, the pilot of the tug decided to cut loose the Horsa. With the tow rope still attached, the glider rapidly lost height and S/ Sgt Cram, in accordance with what had been agreed upon during the previous briefings, immediately made a steep decent and prepared for landing. Whilst the passengers braced themselves for a rough landing, Cram pulled up the nose and landed in the center of a field. After the glider had slid a quite long distance across the field it suddenly came to an abrupt halt.

Fortunately nobody had been injured and the well-anchored Jeeps had remained in place and had not moved during the rough landing. After a quick glance at their maps the men soon discovered that they had come down to the east of the village of Udenhout. The field in which they had landed was close to a school and a monastery in the village of Biezenmortel.

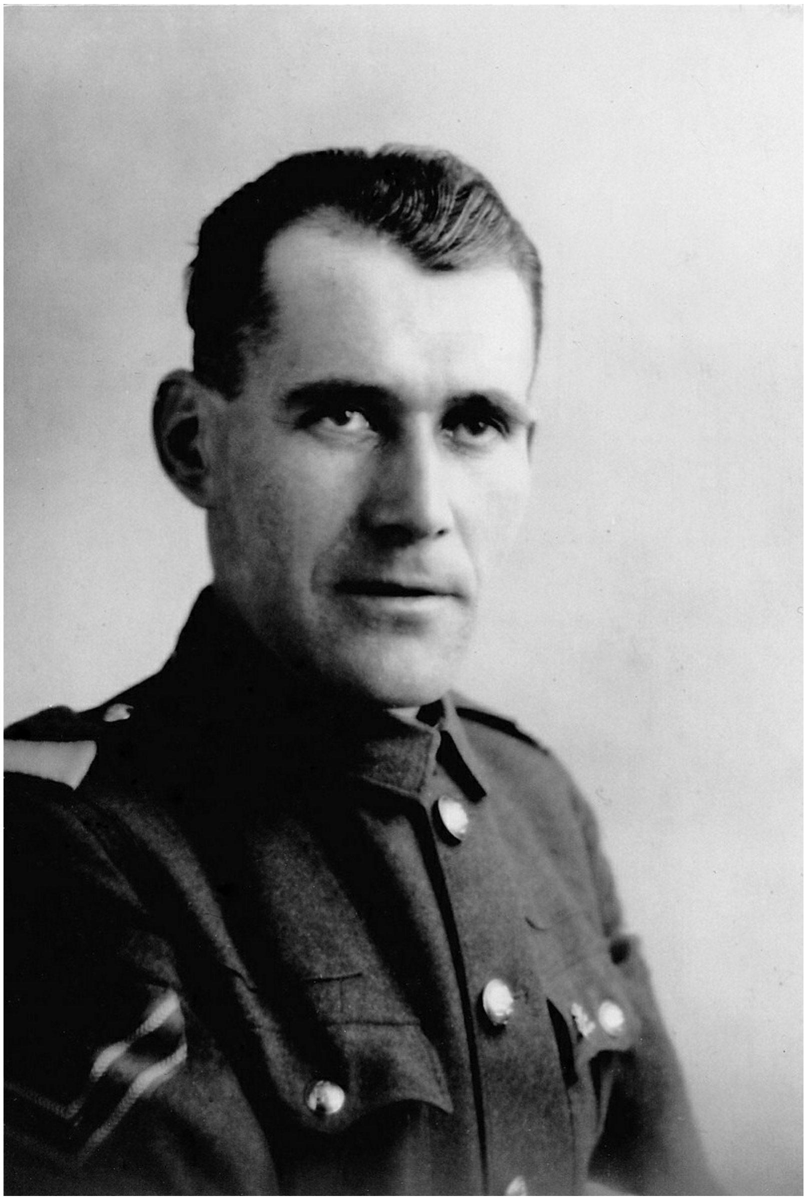
The monastery belonged to the Capuchin Friars who were locally known as the Brown Friars. German soldiers were billeted in both the monastery and the school, and they had watched the Allied planes passing overhead in vast numbers since the early morning.

The Germans in Biezenmortel had also witnessed the landing of the Horsa glider, but thanks in part to the persuasion by the Abbot, Father Maurus, they had been restrained from immediately making an armed assault on the glider’s landing site. There the airborne troops had quickly left the glider through a side door in the fuselage, and a number of local civilians approached. While a small group of these civilian spectators looked on in curiosity, the soldiers walked around the glider with their weapons at the ready, keeping a sharp eye out for any Germans that might turn up. The enemy, however, was nowhere to be seen, and to the amazement of the civilian onlookers the soldiers then quickly began removing the rear end of the glider’s main section. This had to be done so that they could unload the two Jeeps. Above them the sky was still full of all sorts of Allied aircraft that continued flying eastward in vast numbers.

After having removed the tail section of the glider, the men pulled two long ramps from the aircraft and mounted them on the rear of the fuselage, where the tail section had been. This had been pushed aside to allow both Jeeps to be carefully driven down the ramps and away from the glider. Not a single German soldier had shown up while this had been going on and some of the civilians spontaneously started to assist the soldiers with their vehicles.

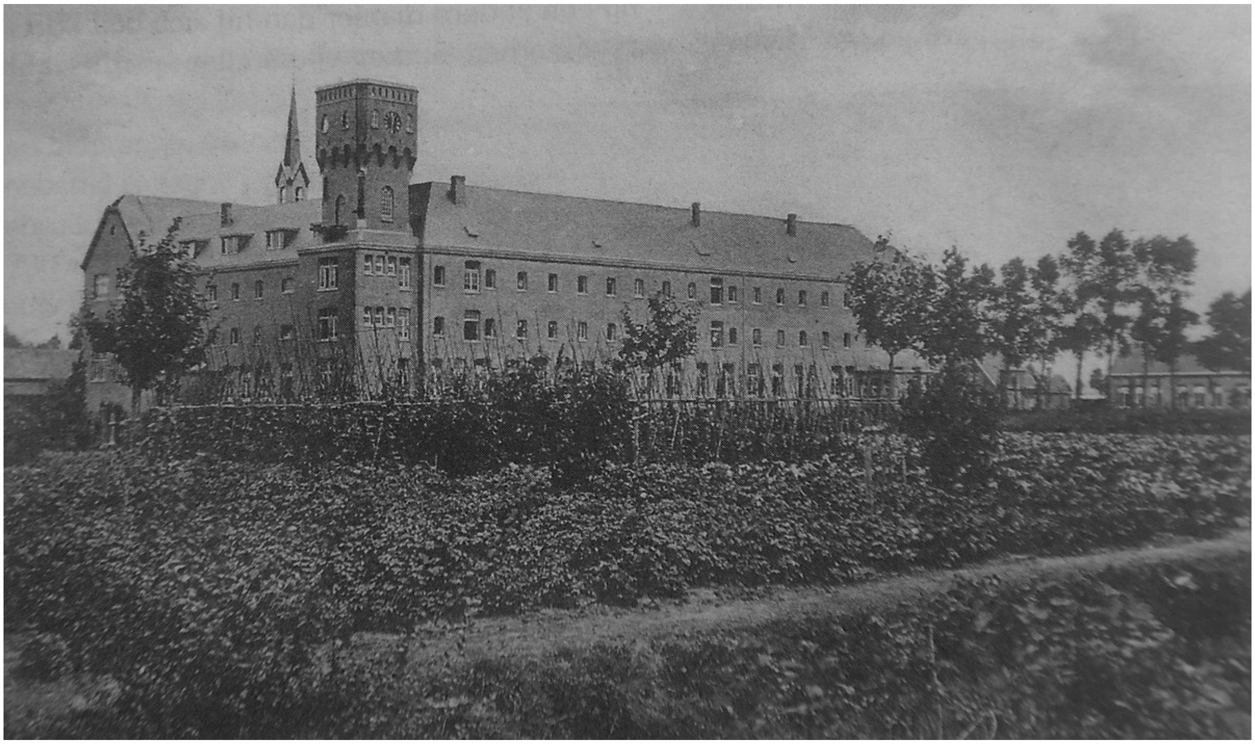


A Horsa glider in a Normandy field after D-Day in June 1944. Note the rear end of the tail section is removed to allow the unloading of troops, vehicles, or armament and equipment. (G. Segers)



The Dutch Commando, Sgt Klaas Luitwieler. This picture was taken during his commando training in England. (Luitwieler family)

The Polish liaison officer of the 1st Independent Polish Parachute Brigade, 2/Lt Janusz Szegda. (G. Segers)



The Capuchin monastery in Biezenmortel. (Heemkundekring De Kleine Meijerij)

It didn’t take long before both vehicles, loaded with military equipment, were standing next to the glider. One of the first questions which Sgt Klaas Luitwieler asked of the bystanders was how they could get away as quickly as possible. The headmaster of the school, Master Van Iersel, came forward and pointed out a route on the sergeant’s map. One of the civilians by the name of Kees van Iersel offered to accompany the men as their guide and said that he was willing to lead them in the direction of Arnhem, through the German lines. However, at the last moment Kees’ father, who was also present, forbade his son from taking part in such a dangerous undertaking. Thereupon another Dutchman immediately volunteered for the task. This was 17-year-old Wim Oerlemans who, together with his friend Harrie Koen, had been one of the first people to arrive at the glider.

Wim Oerlemans from the settlement ’t Winkel. (C.C.M. van de Bersselaar)

Wim Oerlemans, who was training as a male nurse at the local institute, Huize Assisië, in Udenhout, lived in the settlement ’t Winkel near Biezenmortel and knew the area very well. With their two Jeeps the six soldiers hoped to reach the town of Grave, the area where the 82nd Airborne Division would be landing. The men hoped firstly to be able to reach that area and, secondly, to proceed further on to Arnhem. With the help of Wim Oerlemans they had quickly planned a route from Biezenmortel, through

Helvoirt to ’s-Hertogenbosch and from there to take the ’s-Hertogenbosch–Nijmegen motorway to get to Grave. In order to lose weight to be able to increase speed and to create sufficient space in the Jeeps for Wim, the men had quickly removed much of their equipment that was not expected to be of use now, and soon both Jeeps stood on a sandy road at the other side of a ditch bordering the field. In the meantime a Capuchin Friar from the neighboring monastery came running to the landing site with the message that the Germans were on their way, armed to the teeth, and could be expected at any moment, so he instructed the civilians to immediately leave the site. While the friar led the civilians away from the glider and its landing ground the heavily armed airborne troops took their place in the vehicles and took off just as the Germans were about to arrive.

Led by Sgt Luitwieler in the first Jeep with Wim Oerlemans as a guide sitting in the back, the vehicles left the area. He was closely followed by the second Jeep with 2/Lt Szegda and the two Glider pilots, Cram and Whitehead. The vehicles drove down dirt tracks in the direction of the settlement of Laar. At Laar the Jeeps reached a junction with the Udenhout Helvoirt road and here, at high speed, they took a sharp right turn towards Helvoirt.

Just as they were approaching the village of Helvoirt, where they had to cross the Tilburg–’s-Hertogenbosch railway line, they encountered a small group of German soldiers coming towards them from the direction of Helvoirt. At the sight of the two Jeeps speeding towards them the Germans soldiers started firing their weapons at the approaching vehicles. The airborne troops immediately returned fire using their Jeep mounted machineguns and tore past the Germans, crossed the railway line and disappeared in the direction of Helvoirt.

Fortunately, none of the men or their Dutch guide were injured in this exchange of fire and, once in Helvoirt, both Jeeps took a right turn into Torenstraat in the direction of Bosscheweg, the main road from ’s-Hertogenbosch to Tilburg. Driving at high speed they sped through the village, firing at any German they met.

Initially they had planned to follow the Bosscheweg to reach ’s-Hertogenbosch and then drive towards Grave, but upon reaching this main road Sgt Luitwieler saw many German soldiers and vehicles on that road. Unbeknown to the British airborne soldiers, the Germans made frequent use of the road between Tilburg and ’s-Hertogenbosch. The soldiers became worried that if they were engaged with these troops they might run out of ammunition, and, therefore, instead of turning left in the direction of ’s-Hertogenbosch, the two Jeeps raced straight ahead, crossing the main road with blazing guns, and disappeared at high speed in the direction of the village of Haaren.

Having changed plans, they now intended to drive along minor roads to the drop and landing-zones of the American 101st Airborne Division in the vicinity of Best. The American division was due to land there that day and the men hoped to be able to join them. Soon the Jeeps had reached the outskirts of Haaren, and, to avoid running into any more German troops, they decided to take a left before reaching Haaren itself. The journey then continued by country-road through the settlement of Heesakker towards the village of Esch. From Esch the men planned to drive towards Boxtel, intending to take the main road from ’s-Hertogenbosch to Eindhoven to reach the area of Best.

After having reached the Haarenseweg, coming from the direction of Heesakker, they turned left to Esch and raced on at full speed. When the men reached Esch and drove through the village, travelling at about 30mph, their luck finally ran out. In the center of the village they again bumped into German troops who promptly opened fire on the rapidly approaching vehicles. In front of Sint-Willibrordus church, when the Jeeps took the sharp bend Haarenseweg/Dorpsstraat in the direction of the village of Sint-Michielsgestel, S/ Sgt Cram, fell out of the second Jeep.

He had been manning the Bren gun during the ride and while firing at the Germans he lost his balance and, unable to grab onto anything, tumbled from the vehicle. Sgt Whitehead immediately shouted to the driver and the lieutenant to stop the vehicle. However, due to Sgt Whitehead’s heavy Lancashire accent neither understood him, and Lt Szegda ordered the driver to keep moving. The unfortunate S/ Sgt Cram was captured immediately and taken away wounded. He would remain a prisoner for the remainder of the war.

The two Jeeps continued at full speed through Esch towards a railway crossing and the Gestelseweg/Esscheweg. This road would lead them to a road crossing, called Sint Charles, where they intended to take the main road to Eindhoven. Just after having passed the railway crossing, the airborne troops came upon a long column of German trucks, just beyond the Convent of the Witte zusters (White Sisters), on the Esscheweg. In order not to be spotted by Allied fighter aircraft the column had parked under the trees along the roadside from the tree nursery of De Greef leading up to the road crossing Sint Charles. As their ammunition was getting low, and because the men assumed that their Jeeps had by now been well noticed by the Germans, they left the road in a hurry. They drove up a path on the right hand side of the road and into a field of recently planted trees next to the nursery of De Greef. Here both Jeeps were abandoned in the open, between the trees, and their occupants made off in a hurry. This ended their wild, rather imprudent trip, their bold plan having failed. With only their main weapons, equipment, and papers the five airborne soldiers disappeared into the adjacent Sparrenrijk forest.

Sparrenrijk

Although living in villa Huize Leeuwenrode on the Leeuwenrode estate on the Esscheweg, 25-year-old law student Cees van Leeuwen and his brothers, Fridus, Nicolaas, and Albert, had not noticed the incident with the two Jeeps. Since early afternoon, they had been watching the massive air armada fly past, and while one of the brothers was watching the spectacle from the roof of their parents' home, Cees and others had gone into the open field to obtain a better view of the spectacle.

Suddenly, there on the path which ran through the young trees of the nursery behind their house, they came across the two olive green army Jeeps. It was only by pure chance that the boys saw them standing there. At first they thought that these vehicles must be from the Germans who, once again, were up to something in the area. However, there was not a German to be seen and the vehicles appeared to be standing there, totally abandoned, while everything else remained quiet.

When the brothers cautiously approached the Jeeps, they saw to their amazement that both vehicles were loaded with wooden boxes, radio equipment, cans of petrol, maps, and other equipment. After the brothers inspected the vehicles thoroughly they began to doubt that these vehicles belonged to the Germans. However, that didn't explain where these vehicles might have suddenly appeared from while a column of German trucks stood, under the trees, along the road in front of their house and the Germans had been looking up in awe at the spectacle above. Out of curiosity the brothers tried, unsuccessfully, to start them. As evening fell the Jeeps still stood there, parked between the young trees, and still no owners had shown up.

Convinced that they belonged to British Army personnel and in no doubt that, in the course of time, they would return to their vehicles, they decided to wait, and so the four brothers, taking turns, spent the entire night waiting beside the Jeeps but to no avail – the British didn't return.

Huize Leeuwenrode at Esch, where the Van Leeuwen family lived. (Jan J. van Leeuwen)

Cees van Leeuwen from Esch. (Jan J. van Leeuwen)

At about 6am the following morning, Monday, September 18, the brothers decided that the Jeeps somehow had to be removed and hidden. They decided to push them down a dirt road, a distance of several hundred yards, into the forest. At dawn the Jeeps were finally moved into a shallow ditch inside a coppice of oak trees and covered with branches and camouflage nets. The brothers further concealed the Jeeps by neatly planting small spruce trees around them. Two of their nieces, Tineke and Riet, plus Fridus' girlfriend Mavis, erased the wheel tracks with rakes.

Next the four brothers decided to commence an extensive search of the area for the lost soldiers in order to offer their assistance. The three young women assisted them and together they searched the entire forest meticulously. Softly singing "Tipperary" and "God save the King," Tineke, Riet, and Mavis walked through the forest. The airborne soldiers could hear the singing coming nearer and nearer but didn’t move, fearing that this might well be a German trap. However, when Mavis had come quite close, the five men, together with their guide, came out of their hiding place and into the open. Soon the four brothers joined them and, like the three young women, introduced themselves to the somewhat nervous soldiers.

It was easy to make themselves understood with 31-year-old Dutch Sgt Klaas Luitwieler acting as an interpreter. Luitwieler had originally been a military police sergeant with the Marechaussee in Holland but, after the beginning of the war, had found his way to England. There he was assigned to the Princes Irene Brigade but soon applied as a volunteer for the commando training course in Scotland. Luitwieler successfully completed this training in March 1942 and was then transferred to the Dutch commando unit, No. 2 Dutch Troop. He was now one of the 12 Dutch commandos that had been attached to the British 1st Airborne Division for Operation *Market Garden* where they were to act as guides, interpreters, and liaison officers. Similar tasks had also been given to the 29-year-old Polish officer, 2/Lt Janusz Szegda. He had been attached to the British 1st Airborne Division to act as a liaison officer between this division and the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade.

Cees van Leeuwen told the airborne soldiers that he and his brothers had found their two Jeeps and had guarded them the entire night waiting in anticipation of the men’s return. When the soldiers heard about the salvage of their vehicles and the care the boys had taken in hiding and camouflaging them, the somewhat suspicious and nervous atmosphere soon cleared. The men appreciated the risks of the brothers’ action and told Cees that another wave of aircraft could be expected to arrive from England that day, again on their way to the dropping and landing-zones of the wider operation, and that they had hoped to link up with the newly landed troops. The brothers explained that there was a strong military presence in the area, and that, for the time being, there was little chance of leaving without being spotted by the Germans. They also explained that the main road from Eindhoven to ’s-Hertogenbosch, which ran alongside the forest that the men were now hiding in, had been used extensively by the Germans in the last couple of days. The men considered their options and decided to stay at Sparrenrijk and build a better and safer hiding place for themselves for the time being.

After some time, the youngsters left with Cees promising that he would provide blankets. He returned later in the day with the blankets and his own white tent, as well as a big pot with hot Brabant style rye-meal porridge. With the help of their Dutch guide, Wim Oerlemans and the brothers Van Leeuwen, the food supply was set up between the villa and the hideout and it was arranged that Wim would help to bring food from the village to the Villa and to the hideout during the first week. At the same time he would also provide the soldiers with information about the situation in the surrounding area. After five days in the hiding place, Wim Oerlemans left the airborne soldiers and returned home on foot. Later on, when the villa on Leeuwenrode estate was being used by the Germans as a command post, the food for the five evaders was stolen from a German mobile kitchen and taken to their hiding place in Sparrenrijk.

Airborne troops at Bergenshuizen

On the afternoon of September 18, for a second day in succession, the skies over North Brabant had appeared black with the large armada of Allied aircraft. The German antiaircraft guns in the area around Esch and Vught had again inflicted lots of damage amongst the many planes that came flying over. Many aircraft were hit and some were shot up so badly that they came down in the area. Many locals gathered on the street to witness the spectacle. Some had even climbed onto their roofs so as not to miss a single thing and to wave at the planes passing overhead. Cees van Leeuwen also witnessed the air-armada coming overhead, having already been prepared for it by the evaders in Sparrenrijk, and it was only later in the day that he learned another glider had come down in the area.

This glider had landed at 3.15pm to the northwest of Esch at Bergenshuizen, near Vught. It was an American Waco glider carrying 13 American airborne troops and their American glider pilot, F/O Chester O. Ritter. F/O Ritter belonged to the 436 Troop Carrier Group of 79 Troop Carrier Squadron. His glider had been towed to Holland by an American C47 Skytrain but when that aircraft was shot down Ritter was cut loose and forced to land prematurely in the surroundings of Vught.

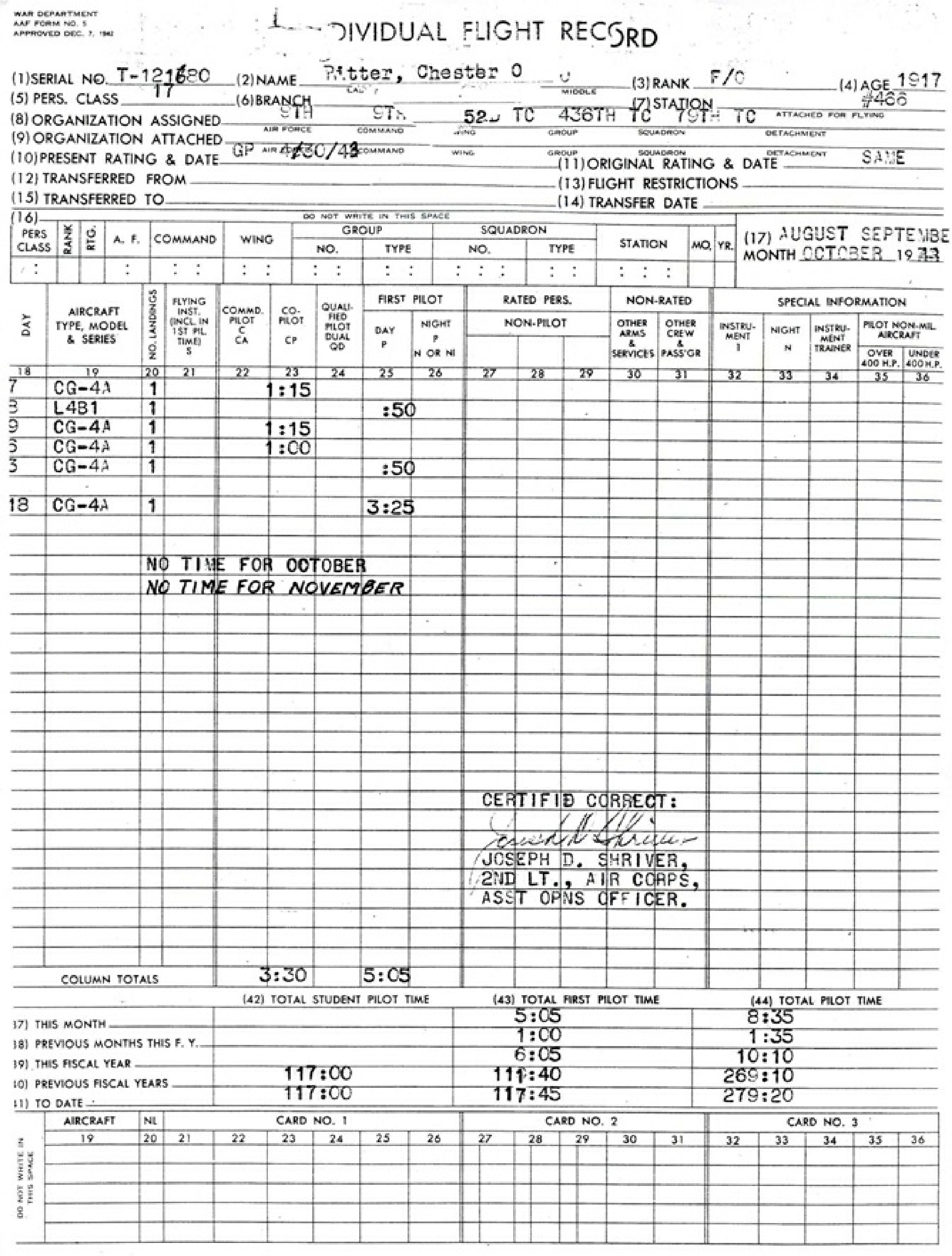
The Skytrain was nicknamed “Hot Stuff” and was piloted by the American pilot 1/Lt John W. Webster, of 436 Troop Carrier Group, 81 Troop Carrier Squadron. The aircraft’s tail number was 42100556 and it was the only aircraft from the 436th that had gone down around Vught that day. The tug and glider had taken off that morning from USAAF Station Membury in the south of England for their flight to Holland via the northern supply route. Once in the vicinity of their Initial Point near

Vught, at about 1,500 feet (450m), Lt Webster had to cast off his glider when his Skytrain was badly damaged by German antiaircraft fire. Shortly afterwards Lt Webster made a successful parachute landing when his plane crashed in flames in a fen on the Venrode estate, some 2 miles (3.5km) to the east of Esch. The aircraft broke in half on impact, scattering the debris all around the fen.

American C-47 tug aircraft towing Waco gliders over Boxtel on the way to their landing-zones. (G. Segers)

A Waco glider behind a C-47 tug over Boxtel. (G. Segers)

Glider-pilot F/O Chester O. Ritter. This photo was taken shortly after October 24, 1944. (J. Korsten)



WAR DEPARTMENT
AAF FORM NO. 5
APPROVED DEC. 7, 1942

DIVIDUAL FLIGHT RECORD

(1) SERIAL NO. T-121680 (2) NAME Ritter, Chester O (3) RANK F/O (4) AGE 1917
(5) PERS. CLASS 17 (6) BRANCH (7) STATION #466
(8) ORGANIZATION ASSIGNED 9TH AIR FORCE 9TH COMMAND 52ND TC WING 436TH TC GROUP 79TH TC SQUADRON DETACHMENT ATTACHED FOR FLYING
(9) ORGANIZATION ATTACHED AIR FORCE COMMAND WING GROUP SQUADRON DETACHMENT
(10) PRESENT RATING & DATE GP 4/30/43 (11) ORIGINAL RATING & DATE SAME
(12) TRANSFERRED FROM (13) FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS
(15) TRANSFERRED TO (14) TRANSFER DATE

(16) DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

PERS CLASS	RANK	RTG.	A. F.	COMMAND	WING	GROUP NO.	GROUP TYPE	SQUADRON NO.	SQUADRON TYPE	STATION	MO.	YR.
:			:	: :	: :	: :	: :	: : :	: :	: : :		

(17) MONTH AUGUST SEPTEMBE OCTOBER 1943

DAY	AIRCRAFT TYPE, MODEL & SERIES	NO. LANDINGS	FLYING INST. (INCL. IN 1ST PIL. TIME) S	COMMD. PILOT C CA	CO-PILOT CP	QUALIFIED PILOT DUAL QD	FIRST PILOT DAY P	FIRST PILOT NIGHT P N OR NI	RATED PERS. NON-PILOT			NON-RATED OTHER ARMS & SERVICES	NON-RATED OTHER CREW & PASS'GR	SPECIAL INFORMATION INSTRUMENT I	NIGHT N	INSTRUMENT TRAINER	PILOT NON-MIL. AIRCRAFT OVER 400 H.P.	PILOT NON-MIL. AIRCRAFT UNDER 400 H.P.
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
7	CG-4A	1			1:15													
3	L4B1	1					:50											
9	CG-4A	1			1:15													
5	CG-4A	1			1:00													
3	CG-4A	1					:50											
18	CG-4A	1					3:25											
COLUMN TOTALS					3:30		5:05											

NO TIME FOR OCTOBER
NO TIME FOR NOVEMBER

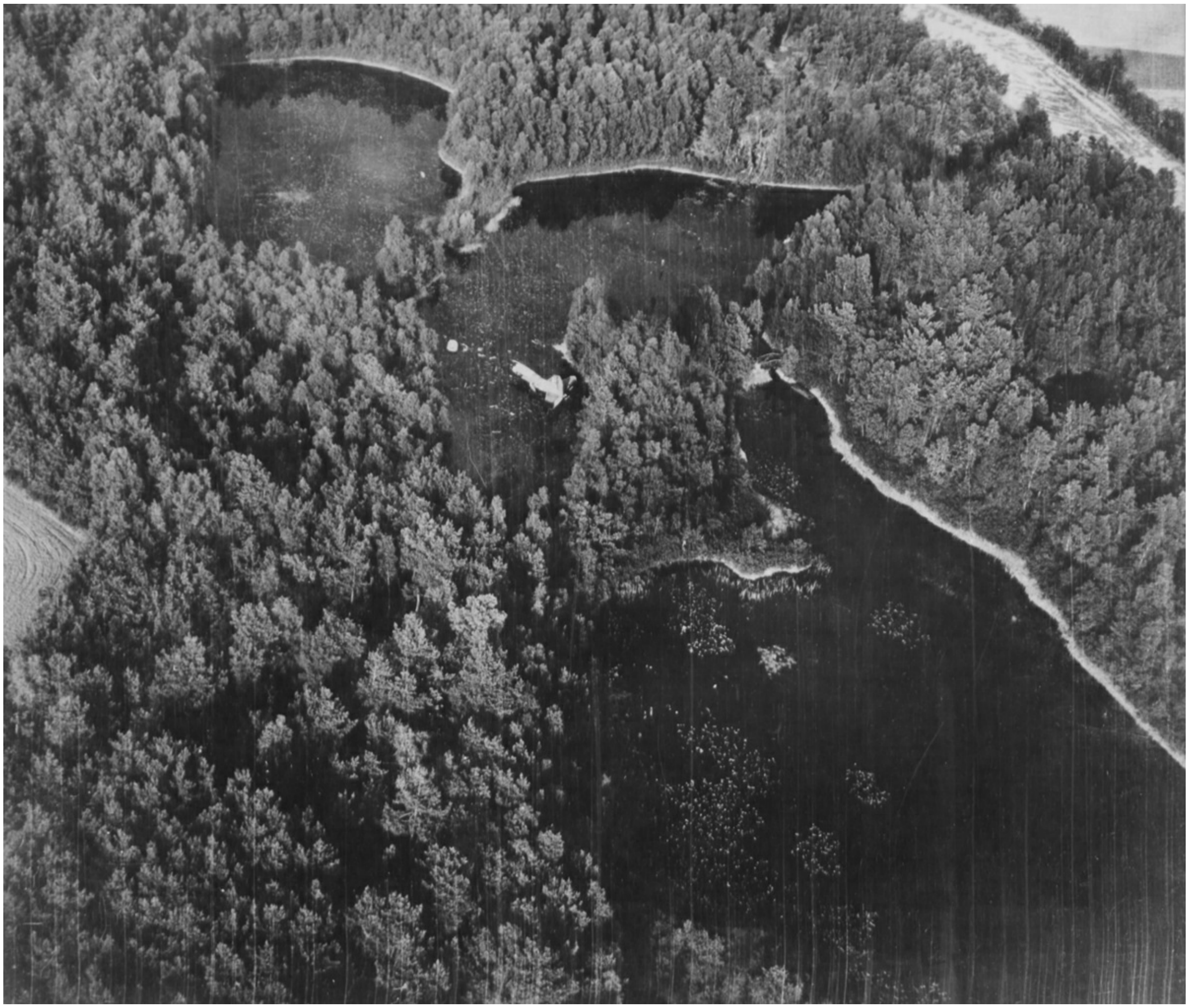
CERTIFID CORRECT:
Joseph D. Shriver
JOSEPH D. SHRIVER,
2ND LT., AIR CORPS,
ASST OPNS OFFICER.

	(42) TOTAL STUDENT PILOT TIME	(43) TOTAL FIRST PILOT TIME	(44) TOTAL PILOT TIME
37) THIS MONTH		5:05	8:35
38) PREVIOUS MONTHS THIS F. Y.		1:00	1:35
39) THIS FISCAL YEAR		6:05	10:10
40) PREVIOUS FISCAL YEARS	117:00	111:40	269:10
41) TO DATE	117:00	117:45	279:20

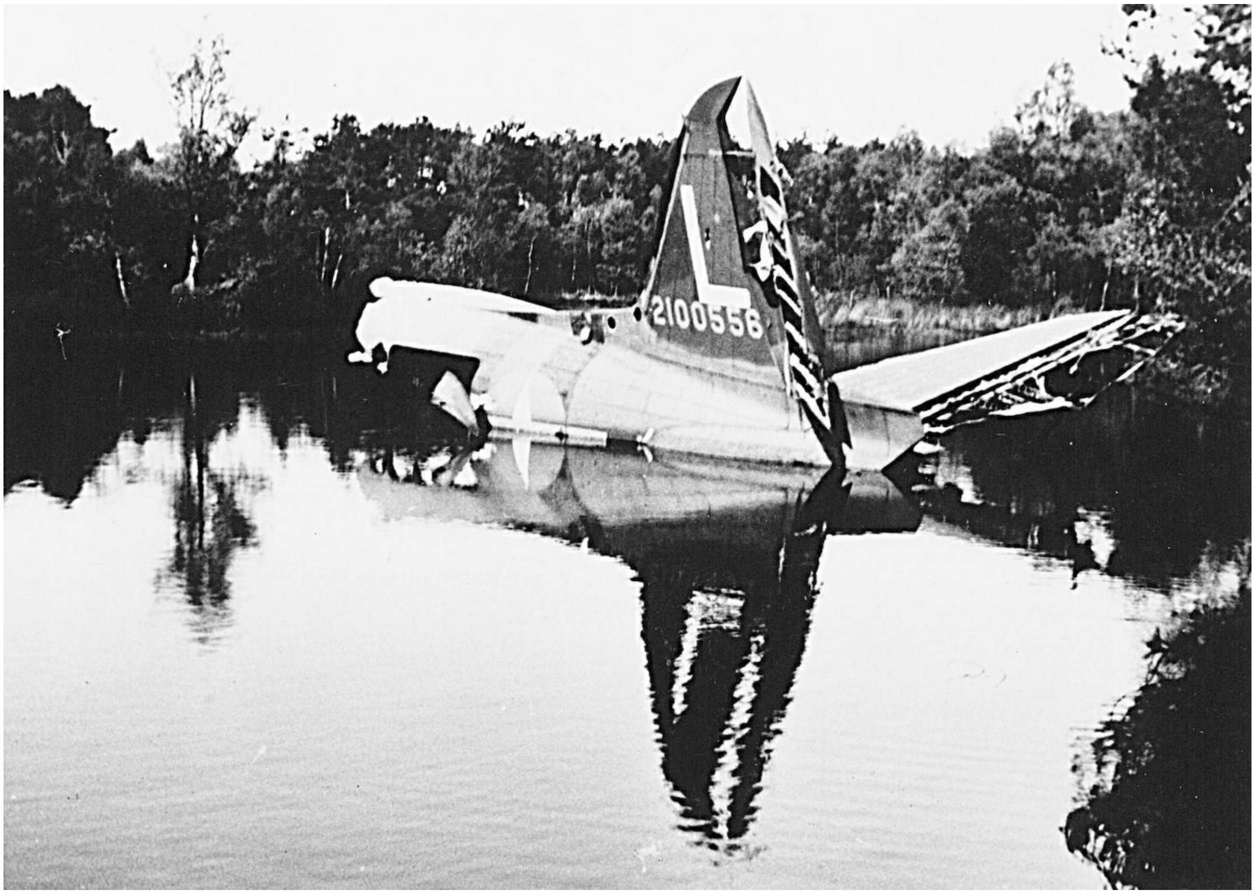
DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

AIRCRAFT	NL	CARD NO. 1						CARD NO. 2					CARD NO. 3				
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

F/O Chester O. Ritters’ flight record. Note that nothing more had been noted on his record after he was reported missing in action on September 18. (J. Korsten)



An aerial photograph of the wreckage of the C-47 Skytrain “Hot Stuff” in a fen on the Venrode estate. (NARA via A.J. van Hees)



The tail section of the C-47 Skytrain “Hot Stuff” in a fen on the Venrode estate. (Cyril van Beers)

Before the aircraft crashed into the fen, co-pilot 2/Lt Whitney F. Brooks, crew chief T/ Sgt Celar J. Obergfell, and the radio-operator, S/ Sgt Harold B. “Shorty” Farr had been able to jump from the aircraft by parachute. Lt Webster’s parachute jump had not gone unnoticed by the Germans. He had crawled into a forest to hide after landing in a field. There were already a number of Germans in the forest and they had soon found his hiding place and taken him prisoner. As their POW he had been taken to Vught. The other three crew members managed to land reasonably safely and evade and hide in the surrounding area. The glider fared a whole lot better than its tug with its cargo of 13 troops of F Company, 327 Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. The leader of this group was 30-year-old S/ Sgt Junior Pruett, who had occupied the co-pilot’s seat during the flight over.

It had been F/O Ritter’s first wartime mission and he was meant to land on landing-zone W near Son. He had only arrived in England at the end of July to join his squadron after recovering from an earlier glider accident. This accident had occurred on September 15, 1943 and it had taken Ritter six months to recover. Nevertheless he managed to put his Waco glider safely down in one of the fields at Bergenshuizen, and after touching down the glider continued to slide over the bumpy ground for quite a distance before coming to a halt at the edge of the field, close to a small forest. This small forest lay alongside the Hoevensestraat, close to the farm of farmer Hooijman on the Bergenshuizen estate. The glider was only slightly damaged during the landing and the fuselage and wings had only a few bullet holes from the German ground fire. Nobody had been wounded or injured in the landing and the troops were quickly able to leave their glider and hide in the adjacent forest.

Gabriël Sauer. He originated from Dordrecht and had gone into hiding in Helvoirt.
(Dekker family)

Some 20 minutes after the glider had landed a young Dutchman, Gabriël Sauer, arrived at the scene. This 18-year-old student from Dordrecht was in hiding in Helvoirt following German razias (round-ups of civilians ambushed at random on the streets to be sent to labor camps in Germany) in his hometown. All young men in Dordrecht above the age of 15 were to report for work duty in Germany, and Gabriël, who had graduated from City High School only two months earlier, had received a letter from the Germans ordering him to report for labour duties, complete with a shovel. Gabriël did not report for duty and not long after this he and his family went for a vacation at their summer cabin in the woods near Helvoirt. When his family returned home, Gabriel remained, living with the family that owned the bakery in Helvoirt. Here he lived together with the family that owned the bakery store. Two brothers operated the bakery, one lived at the store, and the other lived next door with his family and children.

On September 17 while Gabriël had stood in front of the bakery store, watching the air armada passing overhead, he had witnessed Lt Szegda and his Jeeps drive through Helvoirt at high speed. At that moment a German motorcycle met them coming the other way and had skidded off the road, towards a house opposite the bakery, to avoid being shot.

On the morning of September 18, Gabriël went out on his bike, south of the main road running from ’s- Hertogenbosch to Tilburg, to watch the planes coming over. He saw a glider go down in a distance and out of curiosity immediately started pedalling in that direction. When he reached the area he noted that there were already many Germans. Gabriël, looking for the downed soldiers in order to help them, soon managed to find the airborne men. With an orange colored band around his arm, as a sign that he was a member of the resistance movement, he made contact with the group and managed to convince them to follow him. After sliding into a large and deep ditch he showed them on their map where they had landed, and pointed out the location of the German antiaircraft and machine-gun positions in the area.

From that ditch, the airborne troops indicated that they wanted to proceed to a nearby wooded area to find a place with better cover where they could wait until dark and then move on more safely. It was 4.30pm when the group of Americans and Gabriël Sauer started walking cautiously towards the south, towards a small wooded area not far from where they had first come down with their glider. After arriving there they were soon visited by a 17 year old boy by the name of Wim Coppens, from Vught. Wim worked in his father’s grain mill and during the day he was often in the area visiting the local farmers. Wim’s task was to collect the rye from the farms around his village and take it to his father’s grain mill in Vught. Once the rye was ground into flour, Wim returned to the farms again the following day to deliver it. It was while doing this that Wim Coppens had also been a witness to F/O Ritter’s glider landing at Bergenshuizen.

Yet more American troops

Meanwhile, 17-year-old Marinus Verhagen from the Schoolstraat, in the village of Esch, had also seen Ritter’s glider go down and, like Gabriël Sauer, had gone searching for the glider and its occupants. Similarly, the previous day, Marinus had also witnessed the two Jeeps with the airborne soldiers and their Dutch guide, Wim Oerlemans, tear past in Esch. Following his curiosity Marinus went in the direction that the glider had come down and soon spotted it lying at the edge of a large field. After he had approached the glider and finding it deserted he went searching for its occupants. Marinus soon located them, together with Gabriël Sauer, hiding in the small forest and joined the group.

Marinus Verhagen from Esch. (N. van den Langenberg)

The airborne troops were well aware that the Germans in the area must have also seen the glider come down and expected them to send out a search party to look for the glider and its crew. They decided that it was better to stay put in the small forest during the coming night and wait until the next day before moving in the direction of their intended landing zone. They therefore decided to dig in and put out extra guards around their camp. After the men had finished all preparations for the night Marinus Verhagen returned home in the dark. Since Wim Coppens knew most farmers in the area he took Gabriël Sauer to a nearby farm were they both would stay for the night. Later that night, however, Gabriël Sauer returned to the camp bringing with him initially one and, later on with the assistance of a farmer, two other Americans to join the group. These three men were the crew members of the C-47

Skytrain “Hot Stuff,” and had been hiding in the vicinity with the help of local farmers until they were approached by Sauer that evening. They were Lt Brooks, T/Sgt Obergfell, and S/Sgt Farr.

Of the three crew members only Farr had suffered an injury during his parachute landing: he had come down to the north of Esch, in the vicinity of the Beukenhorst estate, and his parachute had got stuck in a tree. Having freed himself from his harness he fell to the ground, injuring his knee. As it transpired S/Sgt Farr had landed fairly close to T/Sgt Obergfell and, with the assistance of some people from the surrounding area, both men soon found each other. They were then guided to a nearby farm where not much later co-pilot Lt Brooks was brought to join them. He too had landed safely and after he had hidden his parachute he was had approached some civilians that were willing to help. Like his fellow crew members Brooks was also brought to a nearby farm where he was accommodated for a short period in an air raid-shelter beside the farmhouse. Soon after, he was approached by someone who asked if he would like to be taken to join two other English-speaking soldiers not far away. Lt Brooks agreed, hoping that they might be his crew members.

Following a short walk he arrived at another farm where he met the two men, who indeed were his fellow crew members, Farr and Obergfell. After having been offered fresh peaches by two women, they were led away by two men who took them to the Beukenhorst estate, where they were to be sheltered for the night. Despite his injury, S/Sgt Farr was initially able to walk to some extent, but as the afternoon wore on, he was more and more troubled by it. It was after 4pm when they arrived at a garden house in the forest of the Beukenhorst estate, where their guides left them. In the evening a well-dressed gentleman came to the house with some sandwiches and the message that they were to remain there for now, but that they would be collected up later that night. The man told them that the Germans had stored lots of ammunition on the estate and consequently the three Americans wouldn’t be able to stay there too long.

When darkness fell, the three men heard somebody approach the garden house, followed by a whistle; this was the signal that they had agreed upon with the gentleman earlier that afternoon. The three airmen went outside and, some distance from the garden house, they saw the silhouette of two people in the darkness. One of them they immediately recognized as the gentleman of that afternoon, but the other, a young also well-dressed person, they hadn't seen before. This man, who spoke English fluently, told them that there were other Americans hiding in the area and that they were to follow him. The three found this welcome news and, according to them, this man was the first person who really took their safety at heart. He spoke in a low voice and, every time when they neared a barn or a farmhouse, he went ahead to see if the coast was clear.

Once they had walked about half a mile they arrived at the farm of Van der Loo. Van der Loo was also the gardener of the Beukenhorst estate and he had not only seen F/ O Ritter's glider come down that afternoon, but also its tug, "Hot Stuff." Furthermore he had seen a number of parachutists land in the direction of the Beukenhorst estate. Van der Loo had been approached that same afternoon and had agreed that the Americans would be brought to his farmhouse that evening.

After a coded knock on the door of the farmhouse, the door opened to let the men in. Only once the door had been closed behind them was the light was turned on. The three Americans were standing in the middle of a room, surrounded by a number of unknown persons. One of those persons explained to the airmen that they were not far from Vught and Boxtel and that the main road between both villages was near the farm.

When Gabriël Sauer arrived at the farm, he brought the news that a group of Americans were hiding in a small forest about half a mile from the farm. The three American airmen were asked to accompany Sauer to their hiding place and they readily agreed. However, because S/Sgt Farr's injury had become more painful as the day wore on, it was decided to leave him behind until the situation demanded otherwise. T/Sgt Obergfell decided to stay with Farr for the time being. It was arranged that if Lt Brooks should decide to stay with the other Americans, and not return to the farm to pick up his crewmembers, Sauer would come back later to collect the others.

After a long walk through the dark night the two men arrived at a sandy path that led into the forest. At the end of this path some people stood waiting. They were greeted by an airborne sergeant and several members of the resistance movement. After some consultation it was decided that the three American airmen would indeed join the American troops and Sauer then returned to the farmhouse to pick up the two other Americans.

Back at the farm of Van der Loo, the injured Farr was placed in a wheelbarrow and, guided by Gabriël Sauer, Wim Coppens and farmer Van der Loo, transported to the forest together with Obergfell. Once they arrived at the other Americans' shelter it soon became clear that Farr's injury required more extensive care than his helpers could provide. Wim Coppens said he would go back to Vught and fetch a trustworthy doctor the following day to have Farr's knee looked after. Sauer, Coppens and Van der Loo then returned to the farm of Van der Loo to spend the night.

Early the next morning Gabriël Sauer and Marinus Verhagen learned the fate of the pilot of the C-47, Lt Webster. Once back with the Americans the two Dutch gave the three crew members the information about the capture of their pilot.

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That Tuesday morning, September 19, Wim Oerlemans had been at a farm in the village of Esch to collect food. Here he had heard of the whereabouts of hidden airborne troops from Ritter's glider and the crew from Hot Stuff. On his return he had told Cees van Leeuwen and Cees had discussed the situation with the Polish liaison officer, 2/Lt Janusz Szegda. Szegda was the senior in rank and Cees asked him whether they should try to contact these Americans and maybe bring them all together in Sparrenrijk. The lieutenant agreed so that morning Cees set out on his bicycle for Bergenshuizen.

Van Leeuwen did not operate in the same organized way as Sauer and Verhagen, but worked on his own. Following the directions of a local farmer he cycled to the small forest where the Americans were supposed to be hiding. After arriving there he left his bicycle leaning against a tree and cautiously walked into the dense forest. Hardly had he gone 6 feet (2m) into the forest when, suddenly, he found himself face to face with two well-camouflaged and heavily-armed American airborne soldiers who were lying there, dug in and well-hidden, behind their machine gun. Cees immediately introduced himself and explained the purpose of his visit to the forest. One of the soldiers then led him to the middle of the forest where he was introduced to the American officers and their Dutch helpers.

The officers had, in the meantime, been advised that they were hiding only a relatively short distance from the headquarters of Kurt Student, the general of the German Fallschirmjäger (paratroops). Gen Student had established his headquarters in a villa of the Huize Bergen estate in Vught. For two days in a row Student had witnessed the Allied air armada from his balcony, flying wave after wave over Vught in the direction of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem.

Cees van Leeuwen explained to the Americans and their Dutch helpers that he had been aiding five Allied airborne soldiers during the previous two days, and that they were in hiding in the forested area of Sparrenrijk. He continued to say that if the Americans so desired, he would be prepared to take them to the five evaders. The Americans were, initially, somewhat suspicious, but with the help of the other Dutchmen present Cees managed to convince them that it would probably be safer to go with him towards Esch and Sparrenrijk, particularly as the move would take them away from the area where the 14 men landed by glider. Their helpers had heard from farmers that Germans had been seen at the glider the previous day and feared they would come back in a larger force to search the area for its occupants. The Americans finally decided to accept the Dutch proposal but it was agreed that Cees would first gather information about the German positions in the immediate area and identify the safest route to Sparrenrijk. He would then return to the American's hideout later that afternoon to brief them and if they would agree on his plan he would accompany them to the airborne soldiers at Sparrenrijk that night.

Some curious Dutch policemen had also visited the American hideout in the forest. Some of them had witnessed the landing of the glider, and, told of their whereabouts, were eager to make their acquaintance. The Dutch policemen, however, were very lucky not to have been shot by the airborne troops for they had initially mistaken them, in their black uniforms, for German SS. Luckily their Dutch helpers had been able to warn them just in time and so prevented the troops from firing their weapons on the policemen. Quite unaware of this, the policemen had walked into forest, bringing with them bread, cheese, and meat. Sauer reassured the Americans that these policemen were completely loyal and that there was no need to worry. It was apparently only the chief of police in Vught who couldn't be trusted, he told them. That man had, amongst other things during the German occupation, been put in charge of the supervision of the camp transports to and from the notorious SS concentration camp at Vught.

Meanwhile Wim Coppens had informed Dr F. van Spaandonk in Vught about the presence of the wounded S/ Sgt Farr who was hiding in the forest. After urging the doctor to visit the American, the two cycled from Vught halfway to the Berghuizensestraat where they arrived in the early afternoon. Following a sandy path they reached the edge of the small forest and entered it through the undergrowth, walking straight into the Americans standing guard with their machine gun. They were greeted by the guards in a friendly manner and one of them led the doctor to Farr. The doctor introduced himself and didn't waste any time before attending to Farr's knee. The treatment took about 20 minutes and after having gratefully received a handful of American cigarettes, the doctor was led back to the edge of the forest, where he had left his bike.

A second glider

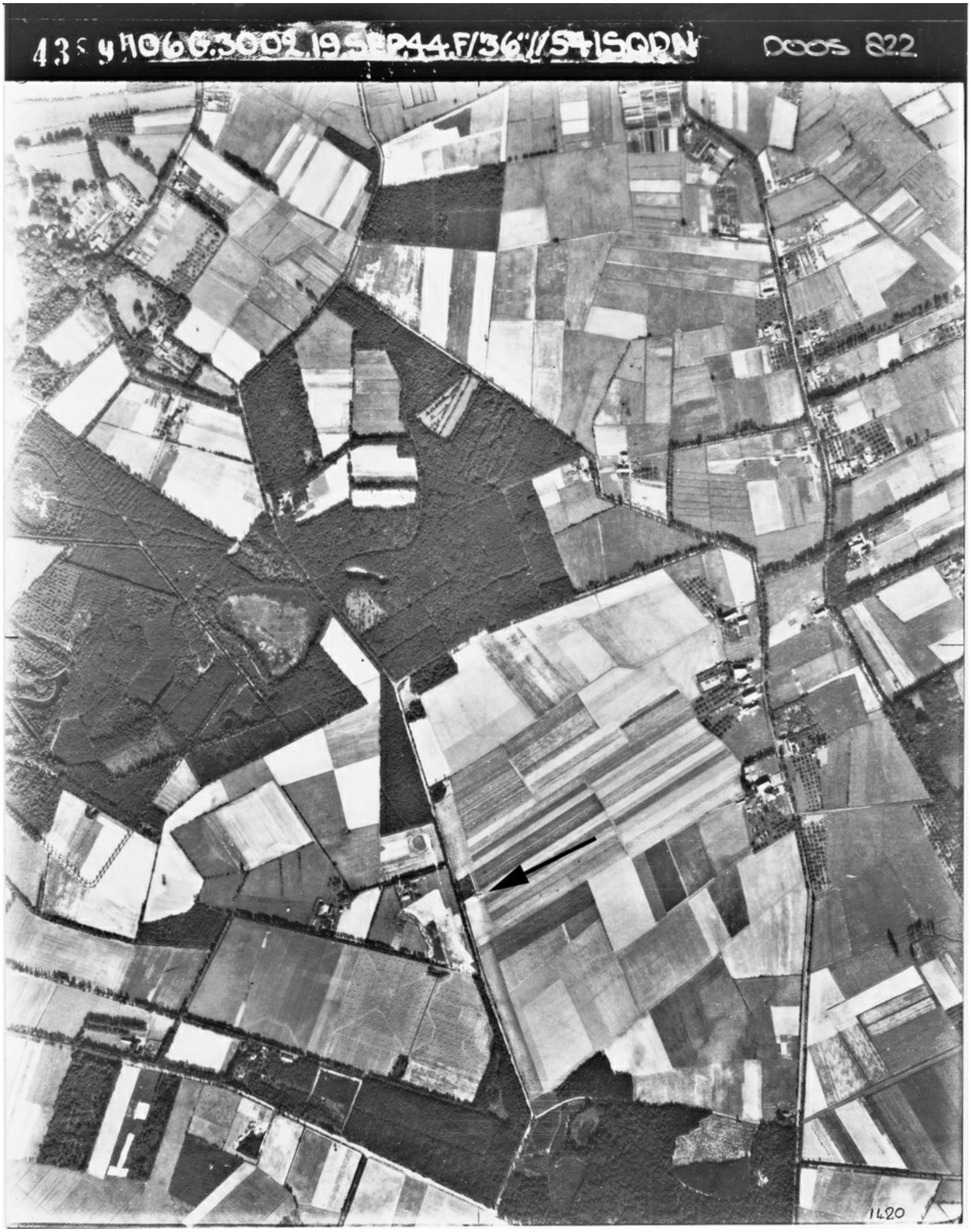
As Cees van Leeuwen was on his way back to the small forest in Bergenshuizen in the afternoon of September 19, at around a 3.15, he heard the distant sound of approaching aircraft. Not long after, as in the previous two days, the sky was again filled with Allied fighters who were soon followed by large groups of Allied transport aircraft with gliders behind them.

As the Allied aircraft passing overhead were pounded by heavy German antiaircraft fire Van Leeuwen approached the area where the airborne troops were in hiding. Suddenly he saw a glider come down in front of him and make a perfect landing in a field not far away. The glider landed along the Scheepersdijk, near the road Berghuizenseweg. Once again it was an American Waco glider, and carried men of the 101st Airborne Division. They were a group of ten airborne soldiers of a mortar platoon of the 327 Glider Infantry Regiment. In addition to the troops the glider also carried a handcart needed for transportation of their 81mm mortar plus the mortar bombs.

The Waco glider, with tail number 42-56174, was piloted by the American pilot, F/O James G. Cleary. Cleary was assigned to the 442 Troop Carrier Group, 304 Troop Carrier Squadron, and had left England that morning from USAAF Station Chilbolton in Hampshire for a flight to landing-zone W near Son. It was Cleary's second mission and the flight had been uneventful until approaching Vught. There the tug aircraft had received a direct hit from German antiaircraft fire causing the left engine to catch fire. This forced F/O Cleary to immediately cut loose his glider at about 1,500 feet (450m). After

Cleary had cast off his Waco glider, by pulling the towrope release handle in the cockpit, he immediately commenced a steep descent in order to land as soon as possible and, at the same time, lessening the time that he may have been a target for the German gunners. During his descent, he spotted F/O Ritter's Waco glider lying in a field beneath him and turned the nose of his glider in that direction. Only feet above the ground he leveled out and landed the glider in one of the farm fields, causing some damage to its wing after hitting a tree.

Immediately after the glider had stopped, a side door flew open and the ten airborne troops and their pilot quickly exited. They were led by the 30-year-old S/Sgt John Burke, and he immediately gave orders to unload their equipment from the glider. In the meantime, some men had taken up defensive positions around the glider's landing site for observation and defence should any German soldiers appear. Some troops were instructed to further disable the glider by smashing up a number of vital components.


43 y 7066.3002 19SEP44.F/36"//541SQDN
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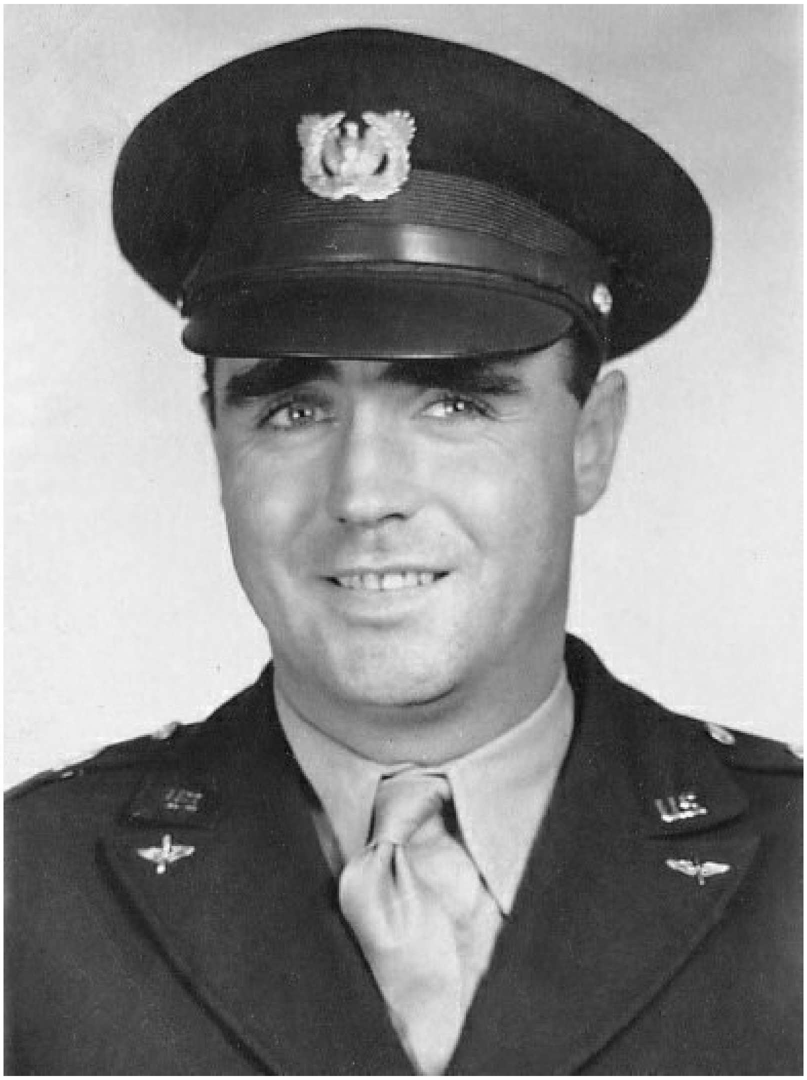
An aerial photograph of Bergenshuizen taken on September 19, 1944. The arrow indicates F/O Chester O. Ritter's Waco glider which landed prematurely along the

Hoevenseweg on September 18. Bottom right, just outside the frame of this picture, the Waco glider of F/O James G. Cleary had landed. He landed on the day this picture was taken. (J. Broekman)



F/O James G. Cleary. (Dekker family)

S/Sgt John J. Burke. (Dekker family)

Just like Cees van Leeuwen, Marinus Verhagen and Gabriël Sauer had also seen the glider descend from a distance and hurried to make their way to the landing site. When Verhagen and Sauer finally reached the glider's landing place they saw that Cees van Leeuwen was already there. With Verhagen and Sauer he approached the glider and its passengers cautiously and made an effort to talk with them. Two of the 11 Americans, Pfc Michael Bokesch and S/Sgt John Burke, initially mistook Marinus Verhagen for a German because he wore light blue coveralls and had blond hair. Bokesch was the only

American in the group able to speak a little German, and promptly challenged Marinus Verhagen, in German, for the password. It was Van Leeuwen who had obtained the Allied password for that day through Janusz Szegda, and he quickly passed the answer to Marinus Verhagen who, in his best school English, was then able to make the correct response. The password challenge to be used that day by the Allied troops was “carrier” and after Verhagen’s correct response, “Pigeon,” the three young men gained the trust of the Americans.

Meanwhile, just like Van Leeuwen, Verhagen, and Sauer, quite a large number of interested locals had also headed for the glider’s landing site. The three young men realized that this public interest was very dangerous for the Americans and they soon managed to convince a number of people that their presence near the glider, given the nervousness of the Germans, was dangerous. After most of the spectators had disappeared, the airborne troops, together with Verhagen, Sauer, and Van Leeuwen, moved away from the glider and hid in a nearby patch of forest. Once on the edge of this forest, guards were posted, and the remainder moved towards the center and gathered there.

Marinus Verhagen told the Americans of the Allied airborne troops they had already located the previous day. These were the three American crew members from the C-47 transport aircraft “Hot Stuff” and the 14 American airborne troops who had landed in their glider in a field along the Hoevensestraat. He then explained that their hiding place was not far away from where they were now and that they were working out a plan to move that group of 17 to a location where another small group of Allied troops was hiding that night. Verhagen suggested that this new group of 11 Americans should follow him and Van Leeuwen and Sauer to the other Americans hiding in the other small forest to the northwest. Although initially quite wary, and after some discussion, they agreed with Verhagen’s plan.

Being burdened with all their equipment in addition to the mortar it was decided to bury the mortar and associated ammunition. It was not required during the move to another hiding place and it could be picked up later should it be needed. Not long after that was done, the American lookouts spotted some German armored vehicles coming up the road with a large group of about 75 German troops in their wake. The airborne troops and their three Dutch helpers rapidly left the small forest and crossed a number of fields into the forested area of Bergenshuizen, further away from their landing site.

The Dutch guided the group through the woods in the direction of the hideout of the other airborne troops. The men were not spotted by the Germans and soon they reached the other group. Once in their hiding place, they were warmly welcomed by the others and the “novices” were informed of the details surrounding the hiding place and the distance from their landing-zone at Son. The group were then also informed in detail of their Dutch helpers’ plans to guide them to another location that night where five British troops were hiding in a forest. A discussion soon arose between the Americans about what to do, either move to Sparrenrijk like their Dutch helpers suggested or make other plans and travel in the direction of their landing-zone at Son.

Because the second glider had landed in the same area as the first one the day before, the Germans would certainly search the area thoroughly for their occupants. The troops soon came to the conclusion that they had better move to a denser and better defensible part of the small forest in which they were now hiding. So the group withdrew deeper into the forest until they found a good spot deep down where the vegetation was dense enough and no road or path was running in the immediate surroundings. Here the airborne troops dug in for the coming night and set out guards around their camp. There was still no decision about whether the group should move to Sparrenrijk, so Cees decided to return to Sparrenrijk and inform Szegda about this new situation.

Early that evening a German patrol armed with machine guns came looking for the occupants of the two gliders. This patrol came from the nearby Sparrendaal estate where they had requisitioned the mansion. Laying flat on the ground, the airborne troops waited for the Germans, ready to give them a warm welcome with a hail of bullets should they enter the forest. No German, however, dared enter the small forest so the airborne troops were not discovered. Instead of entering the forest the Germans walked around it in a wide circle and disappeared, returning in the direction of their residence on the Sparrendaal estate. Yet, with so many Germans around, the Americans were not too happy with the situation, and decided something had to be done soon.

To the Americans

On returning to Sparrenrijk, Cees van Leeuwen told Lt Szegda about the second American glider landing that afternoon and the additional 14 troops.

He told him that the group now consisted of 28 American troops instead of the original 17, and that there was discussion amongst the group about what to do the oncoming days and whether or not they would travel to Sparrenrijk. Thereupon Lt Szegda decided he wanted to travel to the Americans that same night to consult with them and asked Cees to act as his guide on the journey. When it was dark enough, they followed narrow pathways in the direction of Bergenshuizen, but not before Lt Szegda had instructed Cees to jump into the roadside ditch in case of any danger. To Cees that instruction sounded superfluous for what German at this moment would dare venture out into the dark night while they were aware of the Allied gliders that had landed in the area?

It was a clear night with just enough light from the stars to find their way. The men walked one after the other on a winding trail of a country road skirted by a narrow bicycle track. What Cees had considered impossible only moments earlier, nevertheless occurred within a split second. Suddenly they were facing three Germans who were also walking behind one another. In their turn the Germans saw Cees and Szegda only when they were almost upon them. The Germans were recognizable by their typical German Army helmets with large brims. Cees saw the first German grab his rifle and that was enough for him to jump aside, making room for Lt Szegda. The latter didn’t hesitate and fired a few rounds with his Thompson machine gun. The first German dropped straight down with his rifle still in his hand. The second went down almost simultaneously, also mortally wounded, and the third suffered a similar fate.

Immediately they saw a flashlight signalling in the distance. Szegda whispered that this was probably a German post that gave a signal for enemy fire, a kind of warning system for their own troops, he said. Cees followed Lt Szegda off the road into an adjacent field, way out deep into it thus avoiding any approaching Germans.

A bit further into the field they stopped to darken their faces and hands with mud and sand. Next they went through the ditches and across the barbed wire fences from one to the other wet pasture. Suddenly they found themselves in the middle of a herd of startled cows which took off with a loud noise. They dived to the ground and remained there, lying motionless, listening in case there was any alarm from the German side. It remained silent so they went on through the next wet pasture.

In the dark Cees couldn’t orient himself any longer and the two began to wander aimlessly. In the end Cees suddenly saw in the darkness the freshly splintered wood of a tree trunk where one of the gliders had hit the tree with its wing causing the damage to the trunk. By sheer good luck they were on the right track leading them to their destination.

Cees and Lt Szegda eventually reached the Americans and their Dutch helpers, who had heard the shots in a distance. They had a long discussion in order to decide what should be done over the next few days. It was agreed that Szegda would remain in Sparrenrijk with his men for the time being but the Americans wanted to move as soon as possible to a different, more secure place and try to reach Son from there. After this meeting Cees and Szegda left the group to find their way back to Sparrenrijk.

Knowing the whereabouts of the Germans, and making sure they would avoid the spot where the Germans had been shot, they decided to travel in a wide circle around that area. Again they went through pastures and along the side tracks, overgrown with berry bushes, towards Sparrenrijk. Soon, once again, both men lost their direction so they returned to their starting point for a second attempt. With great confidence they set off for the second time, this time using the stars and a compass. It was already 3am and, again, they lost their way. For hours they wandered through the fields, strained to the limit and prepared for anything that might cross their path. They feared for the coming daylight but finally, at around 6am, they arrived at a spot that Cees recognized. They heaved a great sigh of relief and soon they found themselves on a familiar route to the hiding place in Sparrenrijk.

Chapter 7
TONGEREN

A new shelter

As for the 28 Americans, they no longer wanted to join Lt Szegda and his men in Sparrenrijk. After almost bumping into a German patrol that same night, they now preferred to try to make an attempt to reach their original landing-zone near Son, rather than moving to another hiding place. The group of airborne troops considered they now possessed enough men and firepower to give themselves a reasonable chance of success. For their journey, however, they would have to cross territory occupied by many Germans. Their Dutch helpers explained that, given the distance to Son, it would be impossible to reach their destination in one day. They also considered the current size of the group too large to lead them safely and unnoticed through occupied territory to Sparrenrijk. Neither was the hide-out in the small forest in Bergenshuizen safe enough for a party of this size as it was fully expected that the Germans would come back again and search the area by daylight. After a consultation between their helpers and the officers it was decided to try to take the group to the Kampina forest in the east that night. It was agreed that one of the Dutch would first check the route to make sure it was safe and to ensure that they would not get lost in the dark. Marinus Verhagen volunteered to take on this task and while the men were preparing for their journey, Verhagen left the hide-out and went towards the Kampina on foot.

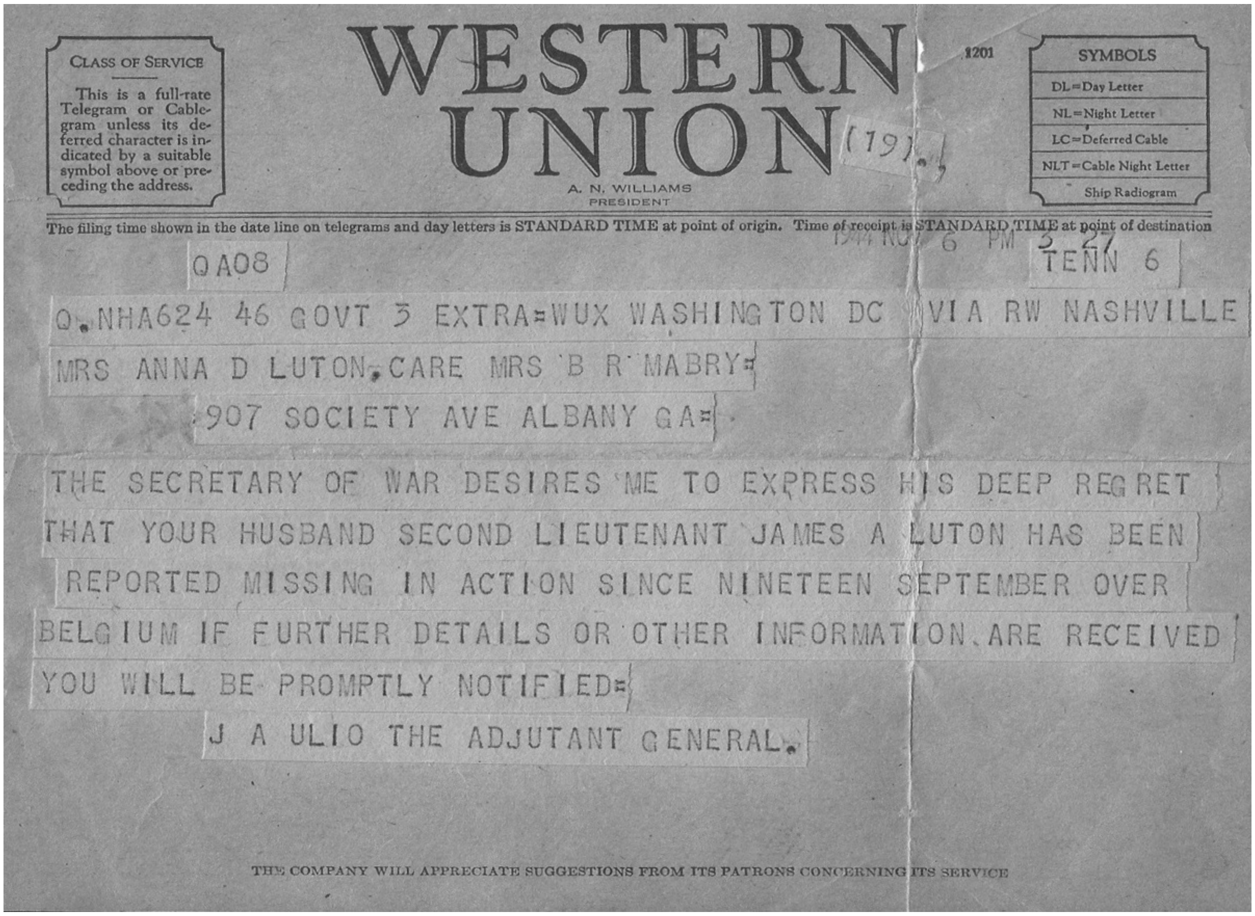
After a few hours of waiting Verhagen finally returned from his reconnaissance and reported that it was safe to travel. While the men were preparing for their journey F/O Jim Cleary, to his surprise, suddenly heard someone calling out his name from the darkness … “Jim Cleary!” Immediately a complete silence fell over everybody and after a few seconds Cleary called out to the voice “yeah, who is it?” … “It’s Luton,” the voice said. Cleary had known a 2/Lt James Luton when he was in glider training at Bowman field in Kentucky so he called out “Luton, come on in here, boy!” A few moments later three soldiers entered the hideout led by a second lieutenant that Cleary immediately recognized to be James A. “Jay” Luton.

The three soldiers Luton had with him were American airborne soldiers from HQ Company, 327 Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, the same unit as those led by S/Sgt John Burke. Luton was with the 442 Troop Carrier Group, 303 Troop Carrier Squadron. After Cleary had explained to Luton and his men where they were and who they were with Luton told Cleary what had happened to him.

Just like Cleary, James Luton had taken off that morning from USAAF Station Chilbolton for his second operational mission. At about 3.15 that afternoon, flying at an altitude of about 1,500 feet (450m), passing the village of Haaren, his tow rope was suddenly cut in two by an exploding German antiaircraft shell. Disconnected from his tug Luton had no alternative but to commence a rapid descent. He dropped below the nose and made a quick dive heading for a small ploughed field. He had forgotten to release the tow rope and it snagged and uprooted a 40-foot tree before his glider came to a halt on sandy soil near a fence at the end of the small field. During the landing the right side of the landing gear got badly damaged but nevertheless Luton had managed to land his glider safely. He had come down in the vicinity of Nergena, about 2 miles (3km) to the northwest of Boxtel. During the flight his glider had been riddled with bullet holes from German machine gun-fire and had suffered considerable damage from shrapnel from exploding German antiaircraft shells. Despite this damage it was a miracle that nobody had been injured by the shrapnel and bullets that had passed through the flimsy fuselage.

In addition to three airborne soldiers, Luton’s glider was carrying a Jeep loaded with radio equipment, boxes of ammunition, and cans of fuel. Of the three soldiers, the Jeep driver, Pte Elijah Pellum and the radioman, T/4 Robert Franks, had been sitting in the Jeep during the flight. Technician, T/4 Devan Johnson, was the leader of the small party and he had been sitting next to Luton in the co-pilot’s seat.

2/Lt James A. “Jay” Luton. (M. Connell Luton)



WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

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1201

SYMBOLS

DL=Day Letter
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Q.NHA624 46 GOVT 3 EXTRA=WUX WASHINGTON DC VIA RW NASHVILLE

MRS ANNA D LUTON, CARE MRS B R MABRY=
907 SOCIETY AVE ALBANY GA=

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR HUSBAND SECOND LIEUTENANT JAMES A LUTON HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE NINETEEN SEPTEMBER OVER BELGIUM IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED=

J A ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

A US Army telegram was send to the wife of 2/Lt Luton after he went missing in action on September 19. The telegram states he went down over Belgium but this should have been Holland.

One of the American CG-4A Waco gliders that landed prematurely in the province of North Brabant during Operation *Market Garden*. (A.J. van Hees)

A C-47 Skytrain flying low over the countryside of Boxtel. (G. Segers)

After the landing the four men had wasted no time exiting the glider and while each of the airborne men grabbed a case of K-rations on their way out Devan Johnson first pulled the plug wires from the Jeep and threw them into the tail section of the glider to make the vehicle useless for the Germans. Luton took two canisters of machine gun ammunition with him and led the men away from the glider over a firm grassy strip where the boot prints weren't too obvious. They climbed a fence and turned left down a narrow lane until they reached a thicket with heavy brush and bushes which was bordering the side of their landing field. Here they climbed the fence and concealed their K-rations under some old piles of field clearings. These K-rations were intended to last one soldier for one day, and each pack provided three meals: breakfast, dinner, and supper. They then moved deeper into the bushes and closer to the edge of the field to observe the glider. Here the men made sure they were well covered and made no sound.

It was dark from the overcast sky and very quiet, and it wasn't long before the men heard the sound of a car approaching. On the narrow lane alongside the field a German reconnaissance car appeared from out of the woods. It stopped close to the landing path of the glider and about half a dozen Germans rushed across the field surrounding the glider. They checked the contents of the glider and tried to start the Jeep, which, of course, wouldn't start. Soon after the Germans had appeared, a few Dutch farmers arrived on site interested to see the glider. The Germans sent some of the Dutch off and they returned with two long poles. The Germans apparently had knowledge of the design of the American Waco glider because they figured out the nose release for the upward-hinged nose section and all gathered around to raise the nose of the glider using the two poles. By raising this nose section they could unload the Jeep from the glider.

The Germans trampled all around the field and if the airborne men had left any tracks they were surely covered now. The Germans were far more interested in the Jeep and its contents than looking for them. By now it was growing darker and the Germans began to work faster. Some of the Dutch farmers left, but soon returned with a large white horse which they hitched to the Jeep. Both Germans and Dutch helped the horse pull the Jeep from the glider and turned it around in the soft furrows. With the Jeep released and on the lane, all moved down the lane in the woods. The reconnaissance car with several German soldiers led the way.

The men waited for some time and thought about what to do next. Luton suggested leaving the K-rations for the time being and to go back the same way they got in through the bushes. He suggested that they take the canisters of ammunition because the rounds would fit everybody's rifle if needed. They climbed the fence, went through the heavy brush and bushes and moved down the lane a few hundred feet in the opposite direction to where the Germans and Dutch had gone. Up ahead, at the end of the lane, Luton saw a young boy open and close a wire gate. When they approached the boy Luton asked if he spoke English. The boy replied "I am a butcher." Luton showed the boy his map, hoping he could show the men exactly where they were; he spread the map out on the ground and pointed to what he thought was north, the direction they thought they were going. Luton pointed to the map and named some cities he thought the boy would recognize and pointed to him and them and then to the map. The boy showed no signs of understanding and again answered "I am a butcher." The men tried other gestures but the boy didn't understand that they were lost. Finally he blurted out "I go get my brother!" They watched him go on to the edge of the pine trees and disappear into the darkening dusk of evening. Luton was not happy with the situation, “his brother might be the whole German Wehrmacht” he said.

Far across the field, opposite their landing field, was a haystack and Luton suggested that they hide there until it was dark. A cave like place had been eaten out of the western side of the haystack, probably by cattle, and proved to be a good temporary hiding place for the four men. As they were too close to their glider, they planned to move on, only waiting for complete darkness before doing so.

Darkness came early; there was no moon or starlight. Luton had the feeling that they were not more than 20 or 30 miles (30–50km) from their intended landing-zone at Son. They hoped that if they continued in the same direction as their flight path they might connect with their airborne forces. Because there was too much exposure in the lane and through the open flat fields they decided to move into the edge of the forest and follow the pine trees. Stumbling in the darkness every few feet was slow going. The sky began to scatter somewhat and now and then the sky lightened a little. A bit of moonlight had lighted their way ahead as they turned from the lane into the woods. Feeling their way around some bushes the men saw a silhouette of two or three wooden steps going up to the porch of a house. There was complete darkness and there didn’t seem to be anyone around and no dogs barked. They quickly moved away from the house into an open field where they climbed a fence and moved through bushes into a larger field. They reached a drainage ditch which they followed through the wide field for cover until reaching some thicket. They went around it and climbed another fence and got back into the drainage ditch. While they stooped low in the drainage ditch a little moonlight began to break through and the men could make out pine trees to their left and more forest up ahead. Suddenly, in the distance across the field they heard a string of American slang and cuss words followed by “Cleary, come here!” As Luton had known a glider pilot flight officer in one of his training squadrons at Bowman Field he had then decided to chance it and made contact.

Later that evening the heavily laden group of airborne soldiers, now grown to 32 in number, were ready for the march to the Kampina. They were accompanied by Wim Coppens, Marinus Verhagen, and Gabriël Sauer who helped by carrying some of the military equipment. Wim Coppens knew the area well and led the way. He had with him a big pair of wire cutters, belonging to the Americans, with which he could easily cut through the fences separating the pastures. It was the night of September 19/20, the night that the recently liberated city of Eindhoven was bombed by the Germans.

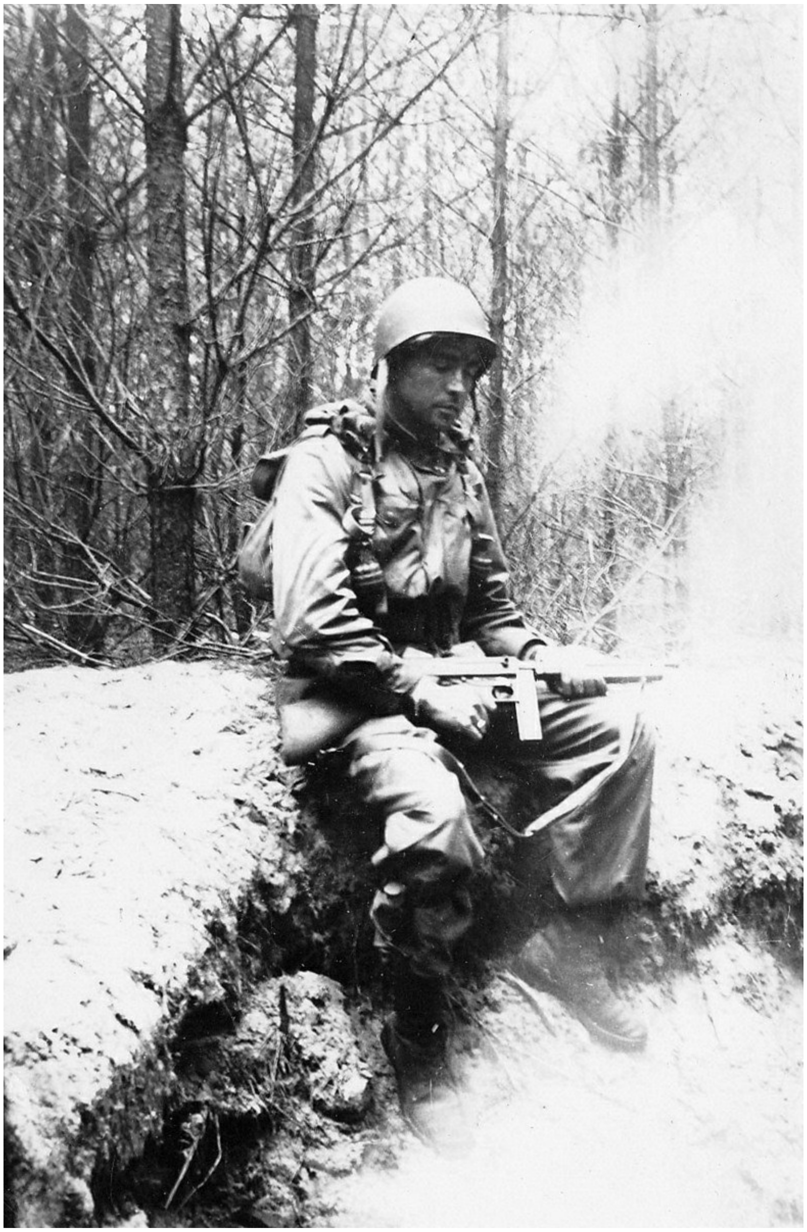
With the red glow of the burning city of Eindhoven visible in a distance, the men walked in the nocturnal darkness. Through the meadows the group walked in a southerly direction until they reached the main road, connecting Haaren with Esch and Vught. One by one the men slipped silently across the road and gathered on the other side. Then the troops and their helpers went on again with their journey taking them across adjoining pastures and closer to the river Essche Stroom and a stream called the Kleine Aa. Both of these were easily were crossed by making use of "hay bridges." These seasonal bridges were made of logs by the local farmers to allow them to cross with their carts loaded with hay.

The march continued in eastern direction but because of both their heavy loads and the tiring route, it became difficult for the group to travel at any speed and only little progress was made. With the rapidly emerging morning light, it was soon apparent that it would be impossible to reach the shelter of the Kampina. Finally, the group arrived near the farm owned by an aunt of Wim Coppens. Wim knew this area well and, although he could not explain his intention to the airborne troops due to his lack of English, he managed to direct them to a safe hiding place. Together with their helpers, the Americans settled in a small dense forest of pine trees and bushes, where they could remain and rest for the day until it was dark enough to safely continue their journey. Once they were settled, Wim left the group and went to the farm of his aunt. He stayed there until the following morning when he returned home.

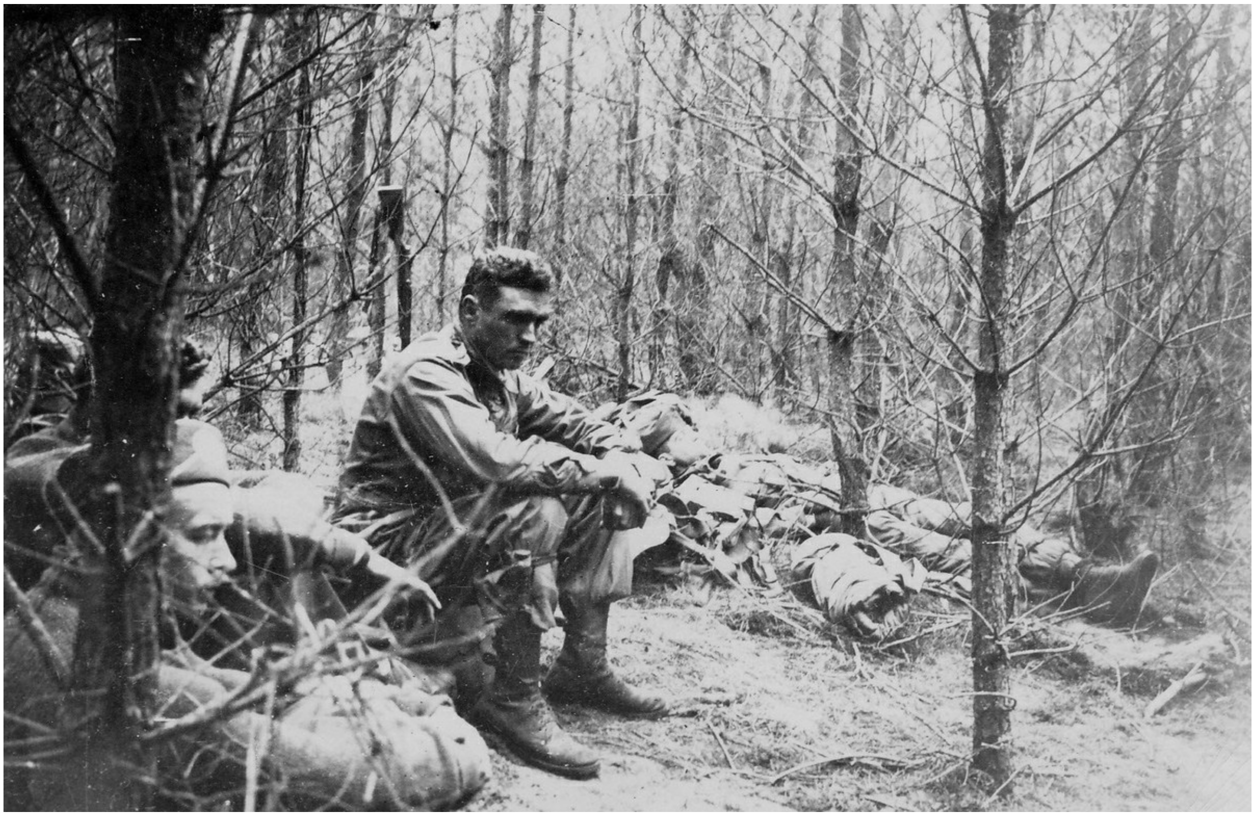
The group was now in hiding near the road Helweg in the hamlet of Tongeren, just west of Boxtel. The hide-out was situated near a small pond and outside the pines in front of them was a flat field of heath. As dawn broke it became clear that it would be almost impossible to reach the Kampina at that time as, in the area to be crossed, were many German troops. The airborne troops therefore decided to stay in their present sheltered positions and wait for a better opportunity.

The party now found itself in the middle of occupied territory, dozens of miles away from their intended landing-zones and their own troops. During the previous months they had been preparing and training hard to fight the Germans, but for the time being the outlook was bleak and they would have to wait for any action. Most of the soldiers in the group were aged between 20 and 30 and although there was a nucleus of experienced soldiers who had participated in the invasion of Normandy in June that year, a good number were still quite inexperienced and some of these were scared and lacking confidence. Most of these men had only recently been assigned to the various companies of the 101st Airborne Division to fill the shortages that had arisen after the fighting in Normandy.

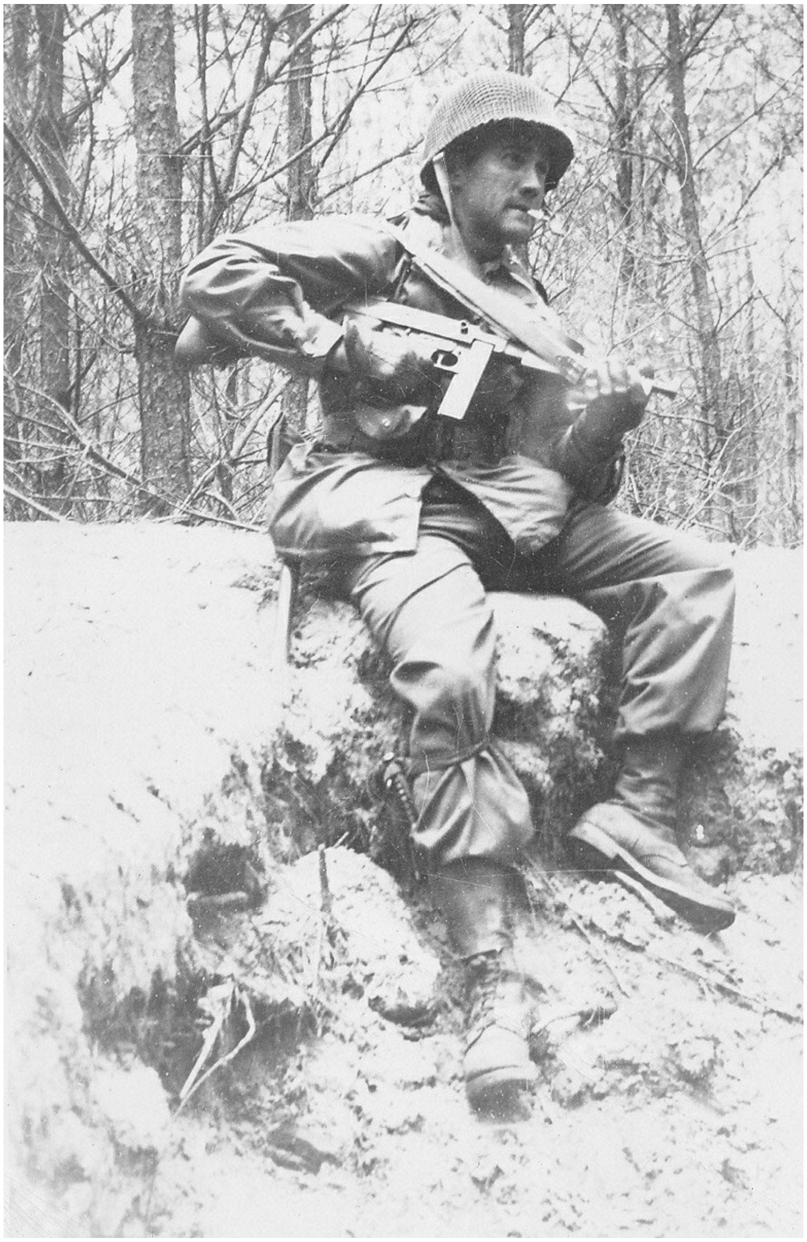
While the men remained in their new hide-out that day, it was quiet in the air, with not more than the occasional Allied fighter looking for a ground target, and distant sounds of planes returning from their supply drops. There was nothing like the number of aircraft that had filled the skies in the previous days. On this day, Wednesday, a few planes flew along the corridor, using the safer southern supply route, without too much German flak, to fly resupply missions for Operation *Market Garden*.



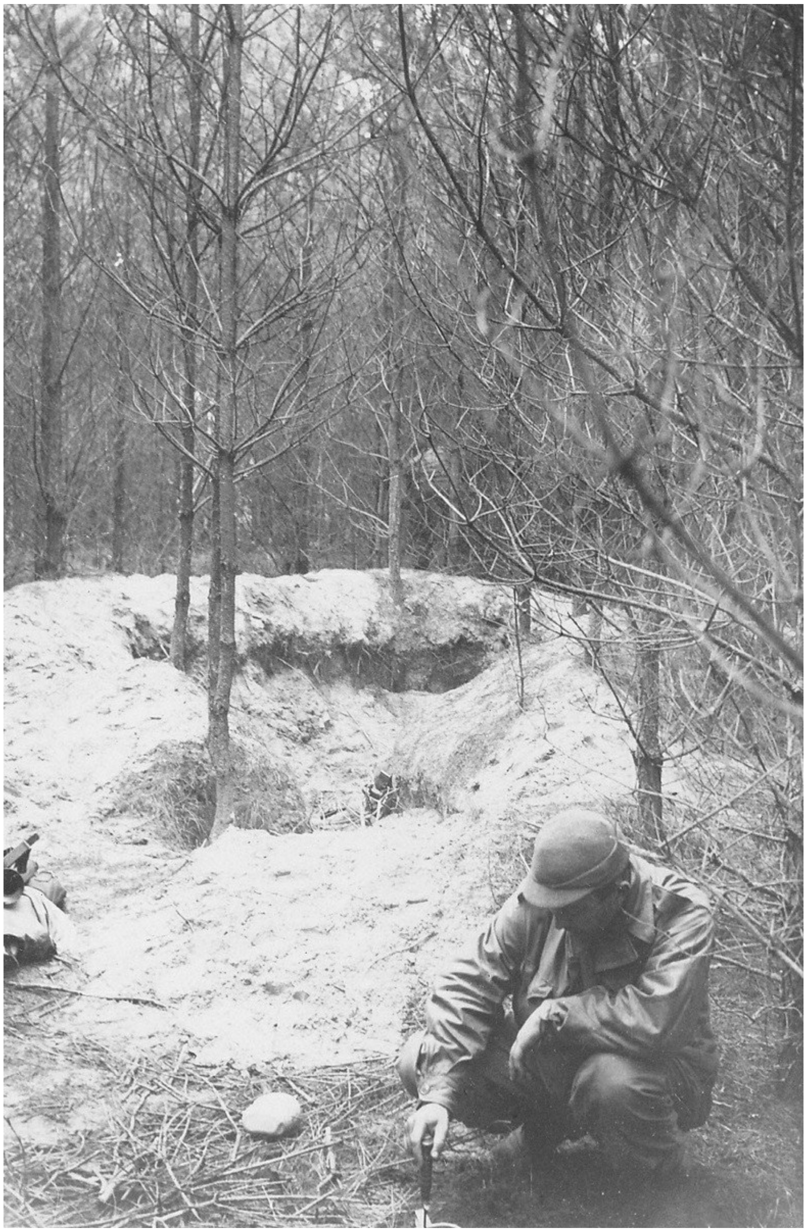
In the small pine tree forest in the hamlet of Tongeren, the airborne troops dug a number of foxholes to defend their hide-out. F/O James Cleary is shown here, armed with a Thompson machine gun and hand grenades in one of the foxholes. (Dekker family)



A group of airborne troops in their hideout near Helweg. In the middle of the group sits F/O James Cleary. Lying next to him is S/Sgt John Burke. (Dekker family)



F/O James Luton poses for a picture. (Dekker family)



F/O Chester Ritter in the hideout near Helweg. (Dekker family)

The food supply for the airborne troops

In the hideout at Helweg in Tongeren the 32 American troops had now almost exhausted their rations and their helpers had great difficulty in providing sufficient quantities of food. The three resistance men could no longer cope with the problem and they struggled to think of a solution. Something had to be done soon, and Marinus Verhagen and Gabriël Sauer decided to call for help in the neighborhood.

Tipped off by a local policeman on Thursday September 21 Gabriël Sauer turned to Jo Knoops in the Ons Doelstraat in Boxtel hoping that he could help him. Knoops sent Sauer to Klaas Dekker, otherwise known as “Uncle Piet,” who lived in the same street, at number 13. The 35-year-old Klaas Dekker was an active resistance member, and Jo Knoops, together with many others from Boxtel, knew him as a member of the underground.

Klaas Dekker from Boxtel. (Dekker family)

Klaas Dekker had been active in the resistance since he had left military service in 1940. He had begun to act against the German occupiers after the

Dutch Army had capitulated in 1940 and all Dutch soldiers, including Klaas Dekker, had been sent home. At first he was acting on a small scale but later on became increasingly active up to the point of accommodating Jews and other people in hiding. Klaas Dekker was also an official at the German Central Crisis Control Department (CCCD) where he was assigned to counter the black market trade and trafficking of food and goods at inflated prices. In that way Klaas Dekker had access to food, and was in possession of the necessary papers to move freely throughout the area around Boxtel.

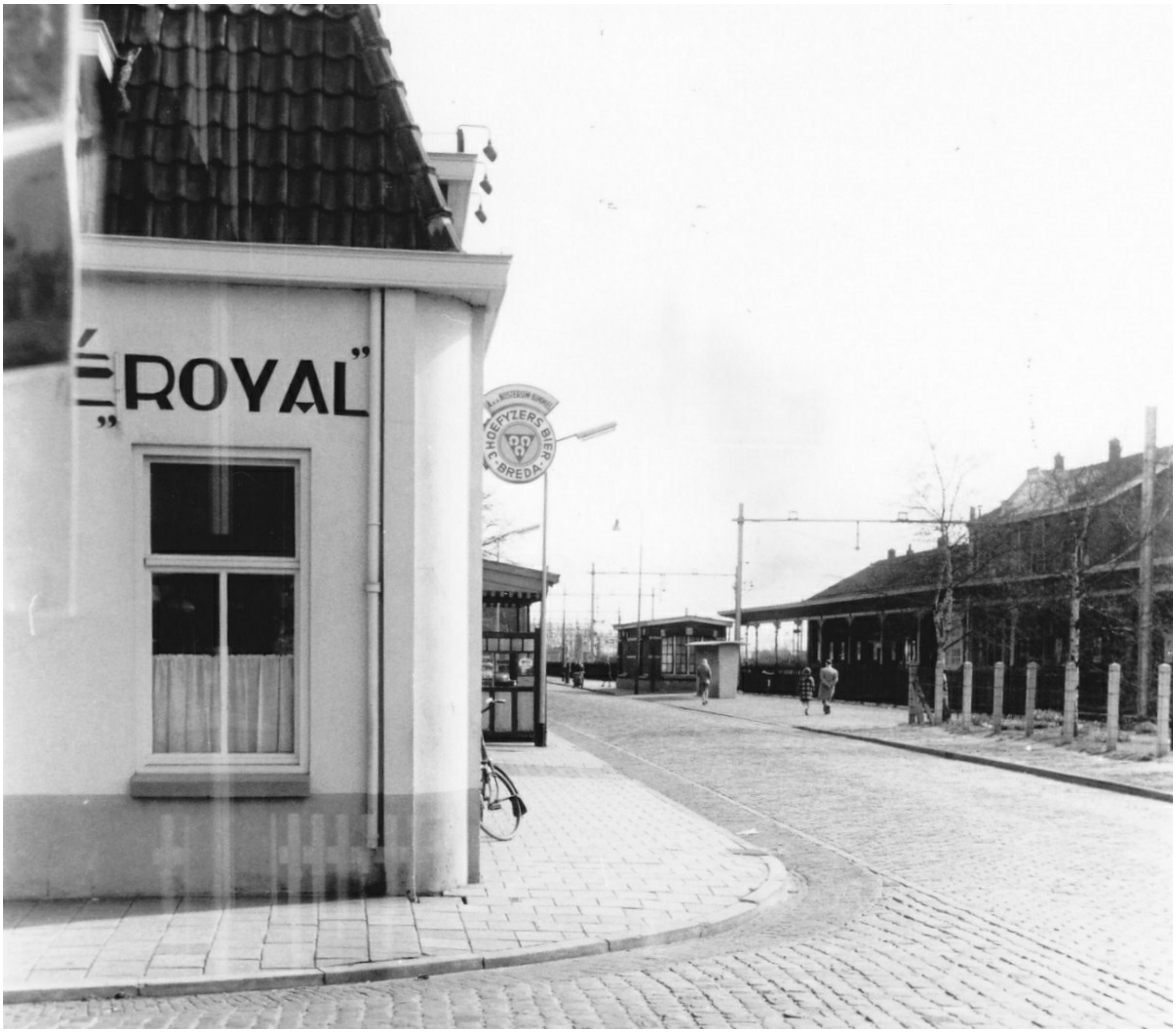
Gabriël Sauer went to Dekker's house and, not concealing his knowledge of his underground activities, asked him directly for help. Sauer further confided that he had been sent to him by his neighbor Jo Knoops, who had said Dekker might be the right person because he had heard stories of Dekker's resistance activities. Sauer had related how he had heard that Dekker had cut telephone wires that carried German phone traffic in the area. Initially Dekker did not trust Sauer, who he did not know, suspecting that he could easily be a spy for the Germans. Also he considered that Sauer's story of 32 American airborne troops hidden in a small forest in Tongeren did not seem entirely credible.

Because Sauer looked very tired, hungry, and pale, Dekker invited him to stay for dinner. During the course of this Dekker gently continued asking probing questions about the details until he became convinced that Sauer had to be telling the truth. Consequently, after they had finished dinner the two departed for Tongeren. Dekker's wife had given them a bag with pears, some sweets, and a large gingerbread. Sauer led Dekker to the hideout in the small forest near the Helweg in Tongeren where they found the American troops. The Americans had made themselves comfortable in the small and dense forest, about ¾ hectares in size. They had posted guards around the edge ensuring that no one could enter or leave without being seen by them.

Klaas Dekker met John Burke and Junior Pruett, the officers in charge of the men, and asked if they wished to be accommodated in Boxtel. However, they rejected this proposal out of hand, explaining to Dekker that they wanted to break through the German lines to reach their own unit at Son as soon as possible. Because Dekker had been doing some observation work in the previous weeks, and especially during the last few days, he had already noted the number of German troops, their artillery positions, and troop movements in the area around Boxtel, so he was well acquainted with the situation. Using the Americans' maps he informed them of his findings and made it clear that, for the time being at least, Son would be impossible to reach. Both officers insisted they wanted to stay together as a group and so agreed to wait until the opportunity arose for them to reach their own lines.

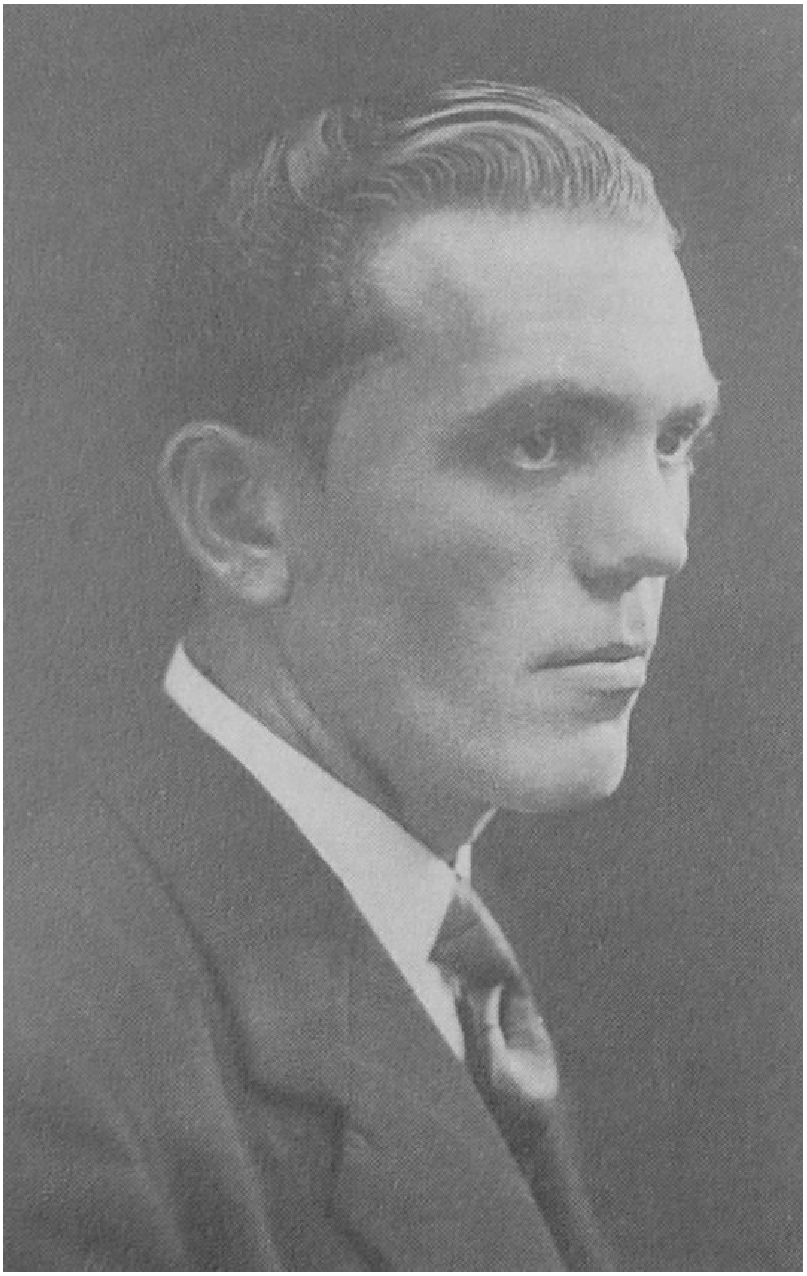
As the evaders saw their food supplies diminish fast, it was necessary to organise the provision of food for them in one way or another. It was agreed that Marinus Verhagen would ask reliable people for food in Esch while Klaas Dekker would try to organize something similar in Boxtel.

Through contacts in Esch, Klaas Dekker was put in touch with Grard van der Meijden who, with his wife Door, ran the Café Royal at Stationsplein 12 in Boxtel. Grard and Door van der Meijden had been involved in the resistance from the start of the occupation. Café Royal, which the couple had been running since their marriage in 1942, had frequently served as meeting place for members of the resistance who were active in the LKP, National Assault Groups, and the LO, the National Organization to assist persons in hiding founded that same year by Reverend Frits Slomp, alias “Frits de Zwerver.”


"CAFÉ ROYAL"
3 HOEFYZERS BIER
BREDA

Café Royal owned by Grard and Door van der Meijden at Stationsplein in Boxtel.
(G. Segers)

Door van der Meijden-Konings from Boxtel. (G. Segers)



Grard van der Meijden from Boxtel. (G. Segers)

Roel Dekker from Boxtel. (Dekker family)

Café Royal was a central base within the Brabant LO, where, amongst other things, distribution of documents, ration and identity cards, and clothing for persons in hiding were organized. Also money from the National Aid Fund and weapons, captured from the Germans by the resistance, were distributed from this café throughout the whole country. For that purpose mainly female couriers were used because they were less likely to be stopped. They usually arrived in Boxtel by train, and Grard knew exactly when someone was due to arrive and on which train. On such occasions the colour of a handkerchief would indicate whether the coast was clear.

Meetings were often held in the pub, where allegedly the trade in mining timber was discussed. This fitted in well as Grard van der Meijden was also involved in the timber business and for that reason knew the Kampina like the back of his hand. Through Grard the local baker, Wout van de Laar from the Rechterstraat/Kruisstraat, was found, who was willing to bake bread for the evaders. For the supply of flour and other foodstuffs Klaas Dekker turned to his boss, the local supervisor of the Food Commissioner in Boxtel, Mr P.J. Smits from Molenstraat 12. He was in charge of the distribution of food in Boxtel and promised Dekker that he could get all the food he needed.

The food obtained through Mr P.J. Smits and the bread baked by Van de Laar was transported during daytime by different routes to the farm of Van der Meyden in Tongeren, which was near to the hideout on the Helweg. Van der Meyden also provided the necessary milk and water. In the dark evening Gabriël Sauer and Marinus Verhagen collected the provisions and took them to the troops in their hideout. Sometimes they were helped by some other Dutch people, or by one or more of the Americans who did not show themselves to the farmer. On these occasions they would hide in the barn or in the vicinity.

Dekker also involved his brother Roel, also an official for the CCCD, and who, like Klaas, lived in the Ons Doelstraat at number 6. Like his brother Roel had been active in resistance against the German occupiers since the beginning of the war. At the request of his brother, Roel went to Mr P.J. Smits asking for butter, of which they were aware that a small quantity was available at the local dairy. This resulted in a written allocation which Roel took to the dairy and received 10 kilos, all of which was transported in small consignments to the hideout in Tongeren.

Grard van der Meijden and Roel Dekker also purchased a pig from farmer Van Hal. The pig was slaughtered on the spot, and then cooked and transported to the shelter in Tongeren in a milk churn. The Americans were used to good and plentiful food and smeared the butter on their bread about 1 centimetre thick, ate the best of the pig and threw the remainder away. They came from a part of the world that lived in freedom and in their barracks they had nothing to complain about. Although they had been trained to survive on the battlefield they had some difficulty in adapting to their new circumstances. Once aware of how the local people in the area had been forced to live in recent years they soon changed their ways and, in future, nothing went to waste.

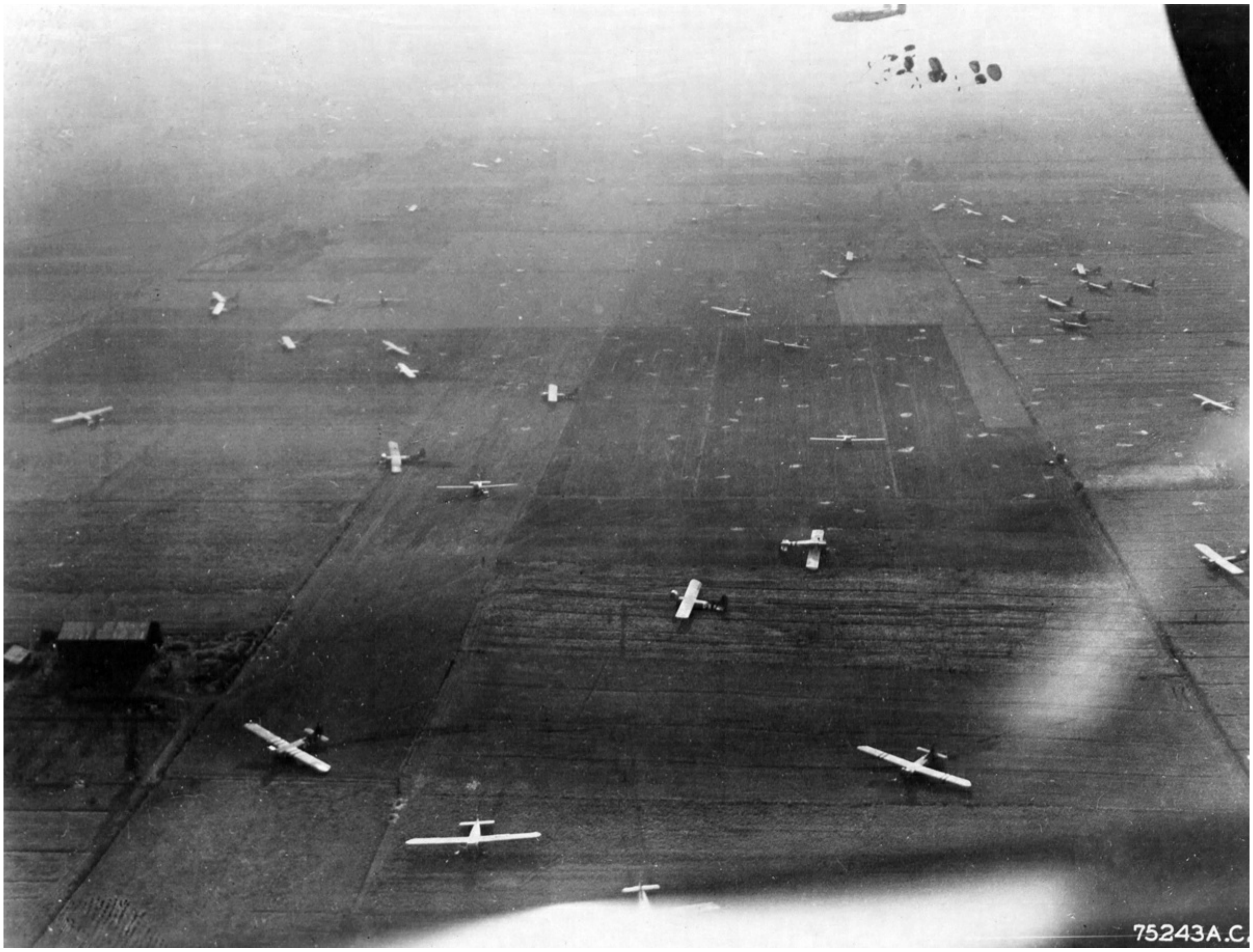
The bread, of which each soldier received two slices per day, initially looked and tasted rather strange to them. But after they had eaten it and had a drink of water, they felt satisfied so the men were very grateful to the baker in that he still could provide the bread despite the obvious scarcity of the necessary ingredients. Apples were also brought regularly by their helpers which were a very welcome supplement to their meagre diet.

How Operation *Market Garden* had progressed so far

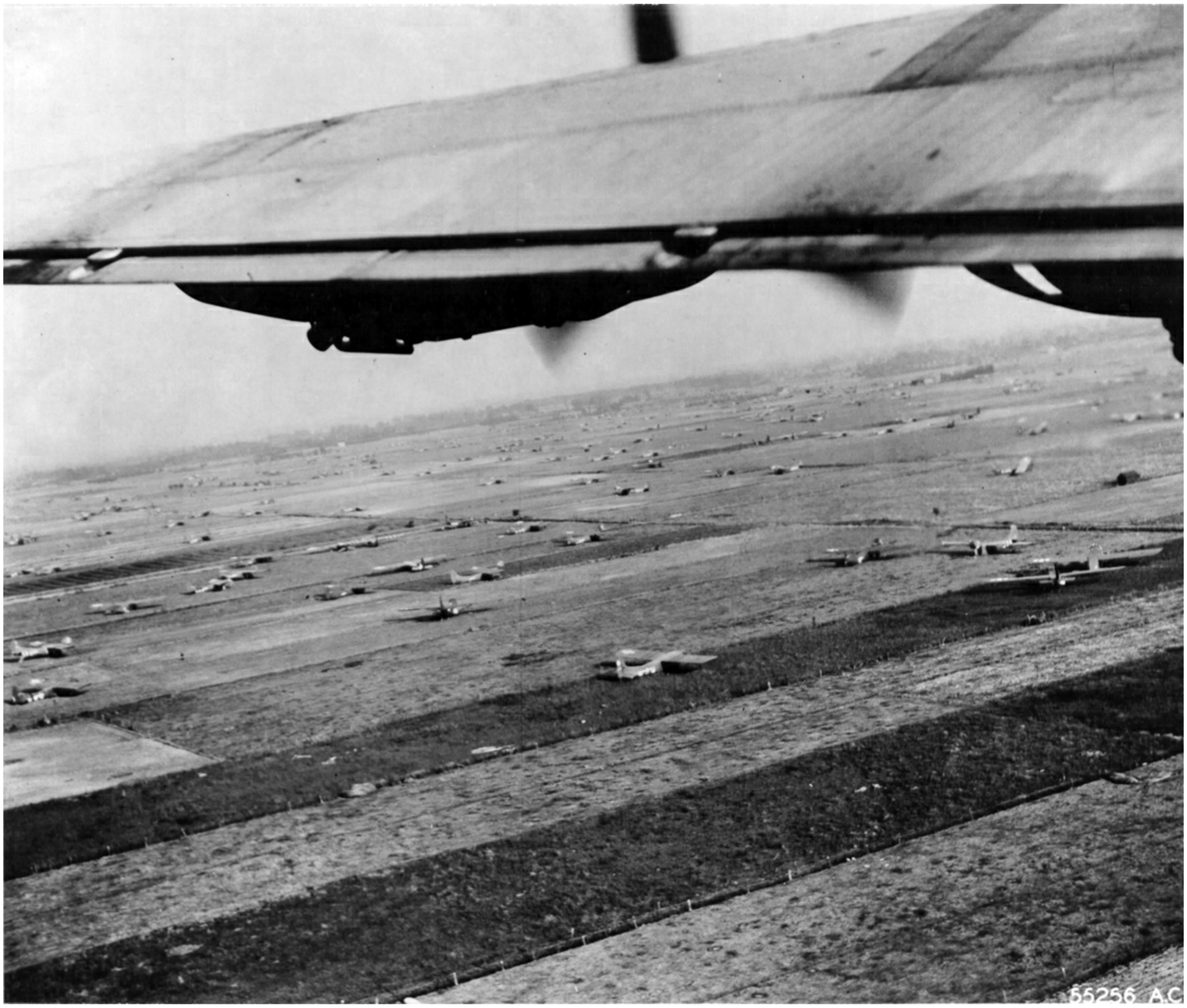
Eindhoven

The wider operation in which these men were taking part was in full swing and into its fourth day. On September 17, against heavy German resistance, British XXX Corps, under the command of Lt Gen Brian G. Horrocks, had broken out of the bridgehead in Belgium and commenced its advance to Eindhoven, the 101st Airborne Division, commanded by Maj Gen Maxwell D. Taylor, successfully landed near Son and Veghel. The airborne troops had quickly left their drop-zones and were marching towards their main targets.

At the same time gliders, carrying troops and equipment, had also arrived at the landing-zones. Speed was imperative in reaching and occupying their objectives: the bridges over the Aa and Zuid-Willemsvaart in Veghel, the bridge over the Dommel in Sint-Oedenrode, and the bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal in Son. By evening, all had been secured apart from the bridge at Son. This bridge was to be captured and crossed by the 101st Airborne Division to enable them to reach Eindhoven. At about 4pm, however, the bridge was blown up by the Germans in the face of the advancing Americans. It was only on the following day, September 18, that the 101st Airborne troops would reach Eindhoven, occupy the bridges over the Dommel, and liberate the city.



The fields of landing-zone W littered with CG-4A Waco gliders. Note one Waco glider has turned over and supplies are being dropped from a Consolidated B-24. (NARA)



The fields of landing-zone W littered with CG-4A Waco gliders. (NARA)

That same afternoon the 101st made contact with the British who had been unable to reach beyond Valkenswaard on the 17th because of stubborn German resistance. They then pushed through to Son where engineers had managed to replace the destroyed bridge by constructing a Bailey bridge. Meanwhile the Germans, coming from the direction of Schijndel, had launched attacks on the American positions in the villages of Veghel and Eerde. There was heavy fighting in the area and Eerde was recaptured by the Germans on September 19.

On the 18th the construction of the Bailey bridge at Son was completed and XXX Corps resumed its advance towards Nijmegen. At around 7pm the Luftwaffe began bombing Eindhoven. Over 200 people lost their lives and hundreds were injured. On September 20 there was again heavy fighting at Eerde and by the evening the village was once again back in American hands.

For Operation *Market Garden* the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment had been supplemented with a battalion from the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment. After landing on September 18 the regiment was mainly deployed to guard and keep the corridor between Son and Veghel open. The 327 GIR would also participate in an attack on Best.

Nijmegen

On September 17 the American parachute and glider landings of the 82nd Airborne Division near Nijmegen were also successful. These troops, under the command of Gen James Gavin, had been able to swiftly leave the drop and landing-zones at Overasselt, Grave, and Groesbeek.

The same day, after a brief fight with the Germans, the bridge at Grave was captured. At Ravenstein there was heavy fighting for both the rail and road bridge across the Maas River, while other troops of the 82nd Airborne Division moved into the city of Nijmegen. Their task was to secure the rail and road bridges across the Waal River. Near the bridges the Americans encountered heavy German opposition which brought their advance to a standstill. The next day, September 18, the attack again resumed, but without success. Heavy fighting erupted in the city and near the bridges. At about the same time the airborne troops at the drop and landing-zones in Groesbeek repulsed heavy German attacks coming from the direction of the German/Dutch border.

On September 19 units of the British Army reached the troops of the 82nd Airborne Division at Grave. In Nijmegen heavy fighting for the bridges continued without success. It was not until September 20 that the Americans finally managed to conquer the bridges across the Waal. The road to Arnhem was lying ahead…

Arnhem

On September 17 the parachute drops and glider landings of the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem were also successful. Half of the British troops marched towards the rail and road bridge near Arnhem. The other half, including troops of the South Staffordshire Regiment, remained on the drop and landing-zones to protect them for the landings of September 18.

British paratroops land between Horsa gliders near Arnhem. (G. Segers)

The march into Arnhem continued along various routes but a large part of the British force encountered stubborn German resistance which delayed their progress. Via their southern route the advance went well with some troops, commanded by Lt Col John Frost, finally reaching their objective, the road bridge over the River Nederrijn. However, before they could capture the railway bridge, their other objective, the Germans had blown it up. The Germans had also removed the center section of the Pontoon bridge, near the road bridge, so that was of no use. Frost's men finally reached the bridge and, on arrival, mounted an attack in an attempt to secure both ends but failed. However, Frost managed to secure positions in some buildings situated on the north end of the bridge. The other British troops continued to try to advance into Arnhem along their respective routes but, because of the fierce German resistance, made it little further than the western outskirts of the town.

On September 18 there was heavy fighting in and around the Arnhem road bridge. Lt Col Frost, while waiting for reinforcements, managed to repel numerous German attacks on his positions at the northern ramp of the bridge. The drop and landing-zones outside Arnhem were under German fire while the landings of the second day took place. The paratroops of 4th Parachute Brigade landed in the middle of the battle and slowly gathered themselves together and started their advance towards Arnhem. The glider landings went much better: the troops were quickly leaving their landing-zones and marching towards Arnhem. Amongst them were the remaining companies of the South Staffordshire Regiment. The remainder of the battalion had arrived on the 17th and had been holding the landing-zones for the second lift but had been despatched earlier that day to try to join up with Frost. All these troops, desperately trying to reach the Arnhem bridge, met heavy resistance and were unable to force their way through the hastily formed German defence.

On September 19 further attacks were mounted but the British again failed to push through to the Arnhem Bridge. The attack in the vicinity of the St Elisabeth’s hospital, on the outskirts of Arnhem, got stuck and a large section of the airborne troops, including many men of the South Staffordshire Regiment, were killed or taken prisoner. With heavy losses, the remnants of those battalions retreated to Oosterbeek where a perimeter was established.

On the road bridge in Arnhem, Frost and his men were still being attacked by the Germans, and Frost waited in vain for reinforcements and for the British army to arrive from the direction of Nijmegen.

By September 20 the situation at the bridge had become almost untenable but still Frost and his men managed to hold out at the northern ramp of the bridge. The units that had tried in vain to join Frost’s men at the bridge had lost so many of their numbers that they had to withdraw to the perimeter of Oosterbeek. Of the 10,000 airborne troops of the British 1st Airborne Division that had landed near Arnhem, only about 3,000 men constituted the perimeter at Oosterbeek and only about 500 had reached the bridge in Arnhem. The bridge at Nijmegen had been captured in the evening of September 20, but at Frost’s beleaguered position there was still no sight nor sound of the British Army coming from the south.

Chapter 8
HIDDEN IN KINDERBOS AND THE KAMPINA

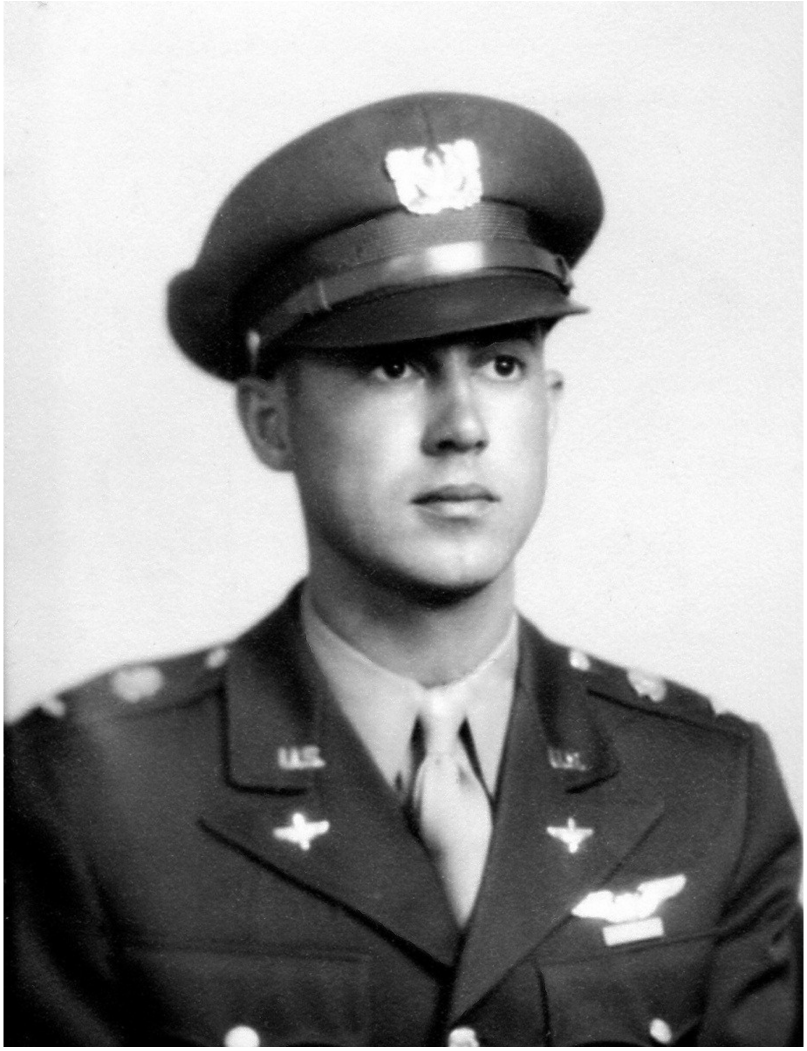
The intensifying German threat

On Saturday September 23, for the fourth time that week, waves of Allied bombers, transport planes, tugs, and gliders flew across North Brabant. This armada of aircraft mainly brought in supplies and additional troops. The aircraft had crossed the Channel by following the southern supply route to Belgium. From the Belgian coast they passed south of Antwerp to their Initial Point between Geel and Leopoldsburg. From this point the air armada turned north, crossed the Dutch–Belgium border, and passed to the west of Eindhoven. The gliders, with additional troops and supplies destined for the 101st Airborne Division, near Eindhoven, were cast off over landing-zone W near Son. A further Initial Point was set at Schijndel and from here the aircraft that were re-supplying the US 82nd and 1st British Airborne Division had to follow a direct route to Nijmegen and Arnhem.

As in the previous days the German antiaircraft fire was very active and once across the border, the fleet came under increasingly heavy fire from the German air defence. A number of tugs and gliders were hit, including the Waco glider piloted by the American glider pilot F/ O Arthur F. Moss. His glider was hit by machine gun-fire numerous times and shrapnel from exploding antiaircraft shells had severely damaged both wings and the control panel in the cockpit. Moss had great difficulty controlling his badly damaged glider and because the speed at which the glider was being towed was much too fast for his damaged aircraft, Moss decided to cut loose from the tow.

Once disconnected from the tug, the glider slowed down, giving F/O Moss the opportunity to regain some control over his glider. From an altitude of 1,500 feet (450m) Moss floated down, made a proper approach, and landed his glider successfully some 1 mile (1.6km) from Boxtel. He landed at 4.10pm in one of the fields along the Mijlstraat near Kinderbos, a reclaimed moor near the small village of Lennisheuvel.

In addition to F/O Moss the glider carried ten airborne troops from the 82nd Airborne Division who were meant to have landed near Nijmegen, on a landing-zone near Sleeburg in the province of Gelderland. This area was designated as landing-zone O, and was situated about half a mile (1km) from the village of Overasselt. Of the ten troops, three came from 3rd Battalion, 325 Glider Infantry Regiment, and seven from 2nd Battalion, 401 Glider Infantry Regiment. Among them were members of medical and communications sections.



Glider pilot F/O Arthur F. Moss, photographed prior to World War II. (Bill Moss)

AIRBORNE
AA

The patch of the 82nd Airborne Division.

F/O Moss was assigned to the 441 Troop Carrier Group, 301 Troop Carrier Squadron, and on that day was flying his first mission of the war in glider Chalk Number 21B. He had departed that morning from USAAF Station Langar in England with S/Sgt John Alm of the 325 Glider Infantry Regiment in the co-pilot seat. During the flight five of the troops in the glider had been injured by shrapnel. Of those only one, Mervin E. Stomberg, had a serious head wound while the other four, privates Fichtner, Mitchell, Mayer, and Lemoine had sustained only minor injuries.

Less than five minutes after Moss had landed his glider they saw two German soldiers on bicycles coming up the road towards them. From a distance the Germans saw the glider in the field, turned around and immediately set off again, presumably to organize reinforcements.

About half an hour later a policeman, A.E. Schuurmans from Stationsstraat 95 in Boxtel, arrived at the landing site. He approached the airborne troops and managed to persuade them to follow him to a small forest not far away from their landing site. The group left the glider carrying only their weapons, ammunition, and rations and followed Schuurmans to the small forest. After arriving there they found a convenient place to take shelter and care for the wounded.

Schuurmans said that he would return to Boxtel to get more medical aid for the wounded and pending his return the airborne troops remained in their temporary shelter. After a few hours Schuurmans returned with the promised medical aid and also brought with him some food for the troops. After the wounded had been attended to the group quickly decided to move on and get away from the area where they had landed. They intended to travel eastward in the direction of their own troops fighting in the corridor. Going as far as they dared during daylight, the group marched east until they reached another small forest. Here, about 1 mile (1.6km) from their landing site, the men decided to wait until dark before continuing their march.

The Waco glider of F/O Arthur F. Moss lying in a field in Kinderbos. (G. Segers)

Brede Heide

The airborne troops were now in the vicinity of the Brede Heide area, a few hundred yards away from the railway line that ran from Best to Boxtel. One man, who had managed to trace the route that the party had gone, approached the troops, presenting himself as a member of the underground resistance from Boxtel and informing them that they had better not move that night because there were many Germans in the surrounding area. He added that a German supply route from Oirschot to the front lines ran less than 90 yards (80m) from the spot where they were now hiding.

That night he returned bringing a doctor and some food. The doctor was Dr Hoek from Boxtel. He examined the lightly injured troops and treated the head wound of Mervin Stomberg, dressing it again. Before the two left a while later, they urged the troops to remain hidden and be as quiet as possible until they returned to let them know that it was safe to resume their journey.

The next morning, Sunday September 24, Louis Katan from Boxtel arrived at the hideout, bringing food and sleeping bags. Katan was of Jewish descendants, and had been in hiding for two years with unmarried sisters Jo and Cor van Hooff in their store at the Kruisstraat in Boxtel. Katan, alias “Wim Fransen,” told the Americans that the glider in which they had landed had been thoroughly searched, looted, and destroyed by the Germans. He suggested that they set up a food supply line from Boxtel, in case the airborne troops decided to stay at their current hideout. This plan was approved by the men and they agreed to spend the coming night in their current shelter and also to remain there for the time being.

On the morning of September 25 it became clear that Pte Stomberg’s condition was deteriorating and that further medical care was urgently needed. Louis Katan came to the shelter at Brede Heide that morning with civilian clothing to take Stomberg to a farm in Kinderbos. This farm was owned by the Van den Heuvel-Maas family and it had been arranged that Stomberg could be hidden there, in a hayloft, for a couple of days. Dr Hoek, from Boxtel, was already a regular visitor to this family because of their daughter’s illness, so it was hoped that his additional attendances in the coming days wouldn’t attract undue attention.

Every time the doctor paid a visit to the girl in the next few days, he also attended to Stomberg’s injury. Unfortunately the nature of this became worse and required better nursing than could be provided in a hayloft. It became obvious that Stomberg couldn’t stay there much longer, so it was decided to take him to Boxtel. Klaas Dekker’s brother, Roel, volunteered to undertake this task. He came to the farm on his bicycle, had Stomberg put on farmer’s overalls, including a cap to cover his head wound, and took him to Boxtel on his bicycle where Roel had arranged for him to be accommodated at his future mother-in-law’s, the widow M. Van Zeeland-Hazenberg, at Molenstraat 94. Here Stomberg could stay until he was sufficiently recovered to rejoin his comrades.

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Monday 25 and Tuesday 26 September were most uncomfortable for the troops hiding in the woods. It had been raining almost continuously and the troops at Brede Heide had been hiding in a ditch all this time, lying down to prevent them from being discovered. Only during the night were the men able to stand up and stretch their legs; they were soaking wet and felt most uncomfortable.

During this period a German artillery unit took up position east of the group, only 110 yards (100m) away. At one point four Germans dug themselves in less than 65 yards (60m) away. It was obviously an extremely precarious situation, even more so when British aircraft dropped a couple of bombs near the German position in an attempt to destroy their guns. On another occasion two Spitfires came flying low over the area strafing the surroundings close to their hiding place. Their helpers later told them the aircraft had been attacking a German communications center on the main road from Eindhoven to Boxtel, running parallel to the railway line.

The Americans could hear the German gunners in their positions, talking all the time, and all night long convoys of horse drawn wagons were on the road, less than 100 yards (90m) from their hiding place. There were a few trucks, but not many, and the men could hear German motorcycles passing almost constantly.

Meanwhile Roel Dekker had informed his brother Klaas that, on September 23 a glider had come down in the area with 11 airborne troops on board. He told his brother that Grard van der Meijden, Louis Katan, and a farmer by the name of Baaijens knew of their hiding place at Brede Heide and were taking care of them. Knowing Van der Meijden, Dekker considered that these troops would be adequately taken care of, at least for the time being, and therefore didn’t try to get in touch with them.

The situation in the corridor

Meanwhile, Operation *Market Garden* had developed and a lot of action was seen in the corridor between Eindhoven and Arnhem. The bridges across the Waal River near Nijmegen were successfully captured by the 82nd Airborne Division and they had made contact with the British XXX Corps, advancing from Eindhoven to Nijmegen.

On September 21 reconnaissance units had advanced via Elst and had reached the village of Driel at the Nederrijn River, opposite the perimeter at Oosterbeek. The 82nd Airborne Division advanced in the direction of Groesbeek, to clear the heights to the east of Nijmegen of German troops. After the day’s re-supply sorties for Arnhem had passed Nijmegen, they were attacked by the German Luftwaffe.

Eindhoven

On September 22 the 101st Airborne Division attacked and captured the village of Schijndel without much fighting. Meanwhile the Germans had launched an attack on Veghel and while the Americans captured Schijndel, the corridor at Eerde and Mariaheide was cut by the Germans. It would take the Americans 24 hours to push the Germans back and reopen the road with the help of British tanks.

While on September 23 the corridor was again open, the airborne reinforcements were brought in by air to land at Son and Overasselt. On September 24, the corridor was cut for the second time, this time at Sint-Oedenrode and Veghel. The next day, September 25, the Americans, supported by the British, attacked the Germans from all sides, and the battle for the corridor raged for the entire day. When evening fell the corridor was once again open.

During the following day the Americans and the British attacked the Germans who had dug themselves in between Schijndel, Eerde, and Sint-Oedenrode. The enemy’s resistance was overcome and the Germans were pushed back, this time permanently. The corridor to Arnhem was now open.

Nijmegen-Arnhem

While the bridges at Nijmegen were captured and British tanks had advanced up to Elst by September 21, the situation in Arnhem had become extremely precarious, particularly Lt Col Frost’s position at the road bridge which proved to be untenable. In the early morning the Germans cleared the last British pockets of resistance at the bridge and those British who had survived the attacks over the previous days were finally captured. The Germans immediately brought in reinforcements to defend Arnhem against the British ground forces, advancing from Nijmegen.

Near the village of Driel, on the other side of the Nederrijn, the majority of the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade under Gen Maj Stanisław Sosabowski landed, while at Oosterbeek the Germans attacked the British perimeter. However, the Poles could not help the British because it was impossible for them to cross the Nederrijn. The only possibility had been the Heveadorp ferry but unfortunately this had been put out of action.

After heavy fighting throughout the day the British situation in Oosterbeek nearly remained static. This was partly thanks to a British artillery unit that was able to provide fire support from its position in the Nijmegen region. Their guns had been called in to fire numerous shells throughout the day on the

German positions.

On September 22 the Germans attacked the Polish airborne forces at Driel, who at that moment were attempting to cross the Nederrijn using small boats, to reinforce the Oosterbeek perimeter. The ferrying was only partially successful under heavy German fire. Reconnaissance vehicles and tanks from XXX Corps managed to reach the Poles near Driel but sadly without any infantry support.

On September 23 heavy fighting again erupted around the perimeter and the Germans carried out heavy artillery shelling and mortaring on the British airborne troops in Oosterbeek. Most of the daily re-supply drops fell into enemy hands and there was a huge lack of medical aid and ammunition. Around 150 Polish airborne troops had managed to reinforce the perimeter after successfully crossing the Nederrijn.

September 23, 1944: Polish paratroops of the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade are dropped on landing-zone O at Overasselt. In the fields Waco gliders that landed previously can be seen. (NARA)

The next day, September 24, XXX Corps once more attempted to reinforce the perimeter, but they failed and only few soldiers reached the area around Oosterbeek. It was then decided to withdraw the remaining airborne troops from the perimeter across the Nederrijn. Thereafter the British airborne troops at Oosterbeek received artillery support to relieve their situation. The guns fired over a distance of 11 miles (18km) from an area near Nijmegen. That night both British infantry and Polish airborne troops tried to cross the Nederrijn from the northern bank but they failed.

The entire day of September 25 was spent making preparations to evacuate the British troops from Oosterbeek that night. Under cover of heavy artillery fire from Nijmegen, “Operation Berlin” (as it was somewhat humorously called) started in the evening and by early next morning the British had succeeded in withdrawing 2,150 British airborne troops by small boats, including men belonging to the South Staffordshire Regiment. At the dawning of the day the evacuation was aborted because of increasing German fire, leaving the wounded and medical units behind. Operation *Market Garden* had not progressed beyond the area between Nijmegen and Arnhem; consequently now the new front line was close to Nijmegen.

To the Kampina

Meanwhile back at his home Klaas Dekker kept himself appraised of what was happening along the front line to the east of Boxtel by listening to his secret radio. By now he had become quite well aware of the situation throughout the corridor. He also kept an eye on the German troop movements in and around Boxtel and after a while became aware of a potential danger for the American troops, hidden at Brede Heide. He had heard that more German combat troops were expected to concentrate in that area and German artillery units armed with heavy guns had already been spotted.

The risk that the American hideout in Tongeren would also be discovered increased, as here too the activity of the German forces increased day by day. Only a couple of days after their arrival the men where shushed by one of their guards when a German patrol had approached their position from the northern side of the heath. The men had moved on their bellies through the brush and bushes to where they could see the patrol. There were about eight Germans, each carrying rifles, and they passed as close as 200 feet (60m) from the Americans. They were poorly uniformed in long winter overcoats and overseas type hats and most of them were very young. It had seemed like an eternity until they were out of sight to the south through the narrowing fields. Meanwhile, quite a number of inhabitants of Boxtel and Esch had become aware of the presence of this group of airborne troops; the Americans had left the small forest a couple of times without concealing their uniforms and had been noticed by people in the vicinity. Some of those people had been able to gather the K-rations that had been left behind in the gliders and had brought them to the Americans. Gabriël and Marinus also gathered K-rations, and Luton told them about the cases of K-rations they had buried in the brush across the field from the glider. Both Dutch boys knew the location of the glider and had set out to get the three cases.

It transpired that even some Germans turned out to be aware of the existence of the group of American soldiers in Tongeren. One day, when Pfc Michael Bokesch was on guard at the edge of the small forest, he was suddenly approached by a number of unarmed German soldiers. With their hands in the air, they gestured that they wanted to surrender. The astonished Bokesch told them to “bugger off,” a phrase they apparently seemed to understand, because they left immediately!

On September 26, it was decided that something had to be done about the situation and without delay. Verhagen, Sauer, Van Leeuwen, and Dekker talked with the Americans about the need to find a safer shelter. It needed to be large enough so that the ten airborne troops, hiding at Brede Heide, could also be accommodated. Klaas Dekker appealed for help to a member of the Marechaussee, by the name of Constable Sjef de Jong. Together they went looking for a suitable spot that could serve as the new shelter.

Constable Sjef de Jong. (A. de Jong)

On their bicycles they cycled to the Kampina and, via the hamlet of Balsvoort, they arrived in the woodland of Hertenkamp, at the edge of the Kampina. Here they found a very suitable place in part of forest, overgrown with pine trees and the ground covered by man-sized ferns. It was in the shape of a circle with a radius of approximately 100 feet (30m). It was situated on a patch of higher ground with a lot of undergrowth, surrounded by thick bushes, and lay close to the small stream Beerze. The water would allow the troops to wash themselves, a necessity they could hardly fulfil in their shelter in Tongeren. About 550 yards (500m) away was the hamlet of Balsvoort with the Balsvoort farm, about 3 miles (5km) to the southwest of Boxtel.

Klaas Dekker and Sjef de Jong discussed the possibility of persuading the Americans at Brede Heide to move from there to the new location in the Kampina that evening. Dekker gave De Jong a note for the Americans, written in English, and also a note for farmer Baaijens. Before Sjef de Jong left they agreed to meet at a spot not far from the place of the new shelter that evening. They also agreed that they would locate one another in the dark by a whistle.

Independently Roel Dekker and Marinus Verhagen had also travelled to the Kampina forest to search for a suitable spot for a new hiding place around an area of fens called Huisvennen. That evening Klaas Dekker met his brother Roel and told him what he had found. Together they left for the hideout in Tongeren, arriving about 7pm. Here Cees van Leeuwen was already present. Klaas Dekker explained to the Americans that he had found a new and much safer place for a shelter, and informed them about his plans for that night. Uncomfortable with their current situation, the Americans did not need long to agree to his plan and agreed to move, guided by their helpers, to Hertenkamp that same night.

That evening, when everyone was ready to leave, the moon was shining bright. According to the Americans it was still too light to travel and it was not until 12.30am that they finally felt that it was dark enough to undertake the march to their new shelter. Under the guidance of Klaas and Roel Dekker, Cees van Leeuwen, Gabriël Sauer, and Marinus Verhagen the 32 troops left for the Kampina.

The march to the place near the Beerze was not without danger and coming from Tongeren the group had to walk quite some distance along the Kapelweg. This road ran parallel to the twin track railway line running from Oisterwijk to Boxtel and was used extensively by the Germans. The group had also to find a suitable spot to cross this railway line to reach the Kampina area. S/Sgt John Burke and Roel Dekker walked at the front followed by Cees, Gabriël, and Marinus who walked in the middle, and assisted the troops in carrying their equipment. Klaas Dekker closed the ranks in the rear.

When the group arrived at the railway line they soon found a suitable crossing point and one by one the men crossed to the other side. Despite their best efforts to cross as quietly as possible walking on the gravel between the tracks created considerable noise. On the other side of the track the men slipped one by one through the brambles and continued, under cover of the increased darkness, along the narrow paths and beside the marshes and fens in the direction of the new shelter. When they were halfway Klaas Dekker had to stop to assist the injured S/Sgt Harold Farr who was still suffering from his badly bruised knee, injured in his parachute jump. Despite this injury the American insisted on walking the entire distance. Although he was excused from carrying any equipment, leaning on his stick he was having considerable difficulty in keeping up with the pace set by the others. Klaas Dekker suggested taking Farr along a shorter, but more dangerous route, to their new shelter. After a short deliberation they left the group and disappeared in the night.

The injured Farr was in a lot of pain and quickly became worn out. Klaas Dekker could not allow him to stop and rest because they were on a road where there was a high chance of encountering German troops. Their journey progressed slowly until, after some time, they reached a side path that led in the direction of the new shelter in the forest. Both men walked up the path some 55 yards (50m) when Dekker finally stopped to let Farr rest by the side of the path. While the exhausted Farr managed to get into his sleeping bag Dekker walked on to the new shelter. At the predetermined place Dekker whistled the agreed tune and, in the distance, from the direction that he just had come, Sjef de Jong replied. In the dark Dekker couldn’t see anything and it turned out that Sjef had let him pass by, less than 5½ yards (5m) away, just to make certain that everything was OK.

With Sjef de Jong were the ten American troops from Brede Heide resting, wrapped in their sleeping bags. The group had travelled approximately 5 miles (8km) to reach the area and at every road crossing they had cut the German telephone wires. Once satisfied that all was well Klaas Dekker, Sjef de Jong, and four Americans left the group to pick up S/Sgt Farr.

Meanwhile the 31 troops with Roel, Cees, Gabriël, and Marinus had also reached the side path leading into the forest and had already found the exhausted Farr, asleep in his sleeping bag. The group waited here until Klaas Dekker and Sjef de Jong arrived and then moved with them to the new shelter, collecting the six remaining airborne troops from the Brede Heide en route.

Tired of carrying their heavy equipment and the walking, but happy that the dangerous march had concluded successfully, the group arrived at their new hideout at 5.30am. Forty-two American airborne troops had now been brought together.

A camp in the Kampina

The next morning, Wednesday September 27, the new shelter was fitted out as a camp that would have to serve over a longer period. Blankets and tent canvases were stretched between the trees to create shelters under which the troops could sleep. S/Sgt Junior Pruett, charged with the safety of the camp, posted guards were around the camp. A latrine was dug and the weapons and equipment were cleaned. The flowing water of the Beerze was most welcome and used by the men for a good dip and proper washing and shaving.

While the NCOs Pruett and Burke explored the surroundings of the camp, Marinus, Gabriël, and Klaas went out to arrange the route for the food supply. This route was relocated to the foresters' house, called Huize Kampina, where forester Aalt van den Ham and his family lived. From now onwards all food supplies would initially be brought here. The milk provided by the farmers De Groot and Van Antwerpen was heated here and the bicycles used by the helpers were also stored here.

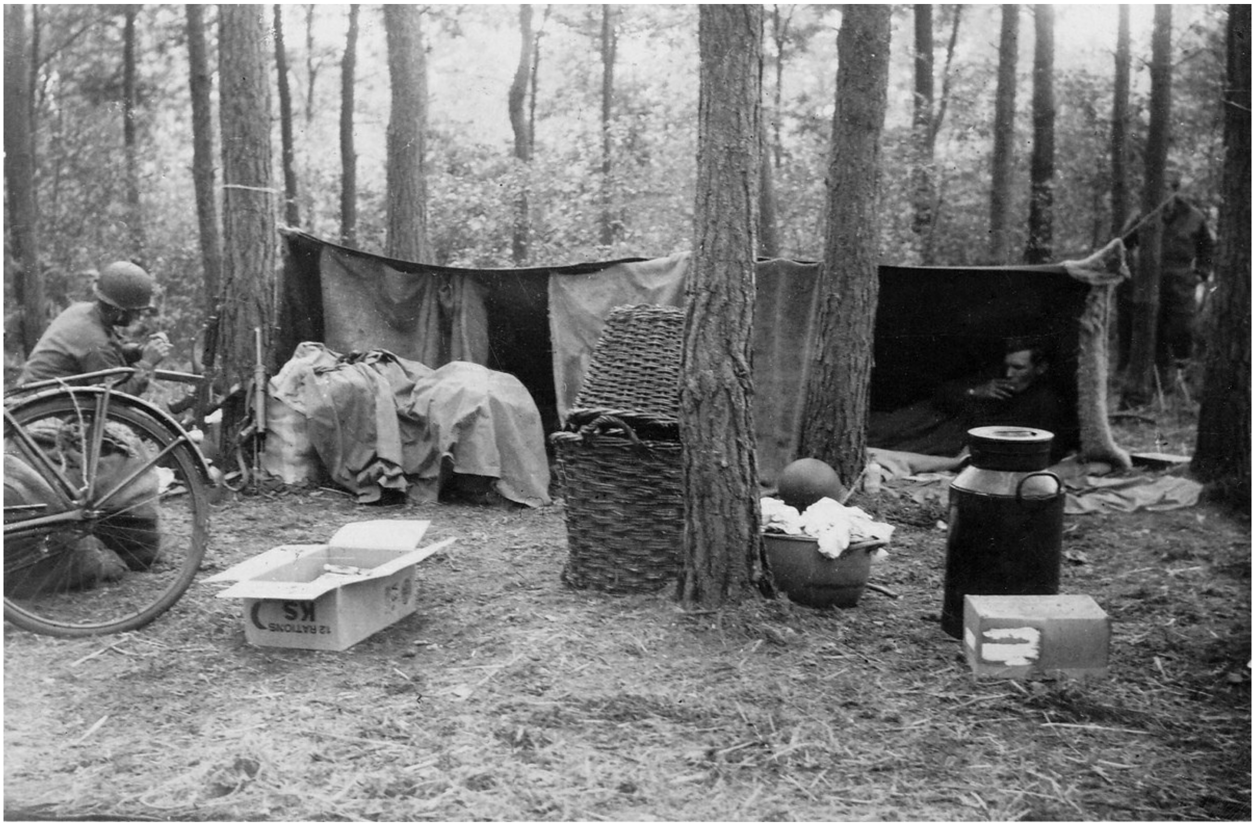
When the Americans were in Tongeren, Klaas Dekker had arranged for the loan of a large tarpaulin which he had obtained from the director of the Nefa-construction factory in Boxtel. The tarpaulin had originally come from the German army medical supply depot WVA in Oisterwijk where it had been used to cover straw on railroad carriages. The tarpaulin, however, had never reached the hideout in Tongeren and was still with farmer Van der Meyden, back in Tongeren. The tarpaulin weighed about 132lb (60kg) and Gabriël and Marinus now transported it on a wheelbarrow to the camp, a heavy chore but necessary as it was to be used to create a large shelter.

Arrangements were also made for the provision of a regular news update about the Allied advance along the corridor. Jan Kwant, alias “Bing” after Bing Crosby, like Klaas Dekker, living in the Ons Doelstraat, regularly visited Klaas to listen to his radio. Together with his sister Cor he listened to the BBC broadcasts and passed on the news to the airborne troops by preparing news bulletins written in English. These were a great boost to the morale of the Americans. The front line was no longer far away from Boxtel and the Americans could clearly hear the sounds of German and Allied artillery duels from their new camp. However, according to the Americans, not much progress was being made, and the front lines remained static. According to them, the sound of the artillery should have been getting much louder if the Allied army was advancing in their direction.

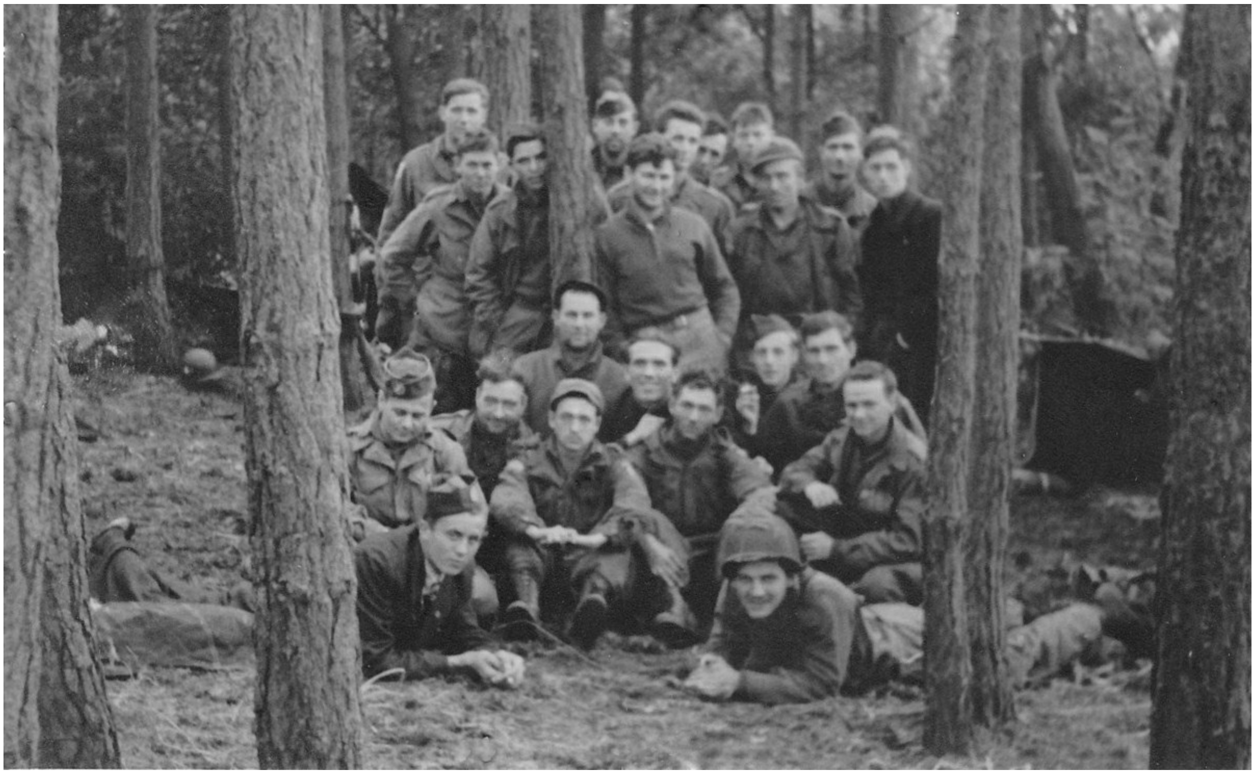
Because of the autumn weather it was becoming increasingly cold and damp in the camp. Klaas Dekker therefore requested the help of sister Christinette, who worked at the Boxtel hospital. Sister Christinette was a very courageous woman who had already helped hiding Jews on many occasions and who had a great dislike of the German occupiers. Dekker immediately received 17 blankets from Sister Christinette from a stock that had been requisitioned by the Germans. Together with the sister he packed the blankets into a large roll and fixed it on the back of his bicycle. He brought two more blankets from his home while Grard van der Meijden, through the Red Cross in Esch, also managed to obtain a further 20 blankets.

Grard van der Meijden also obtained jam, sausages, and various other kinds of food and transported it to the camp in a backpack. Everyone did their utmost for the airborne troops and everything was running smoothly; the men felt safe in their camp.

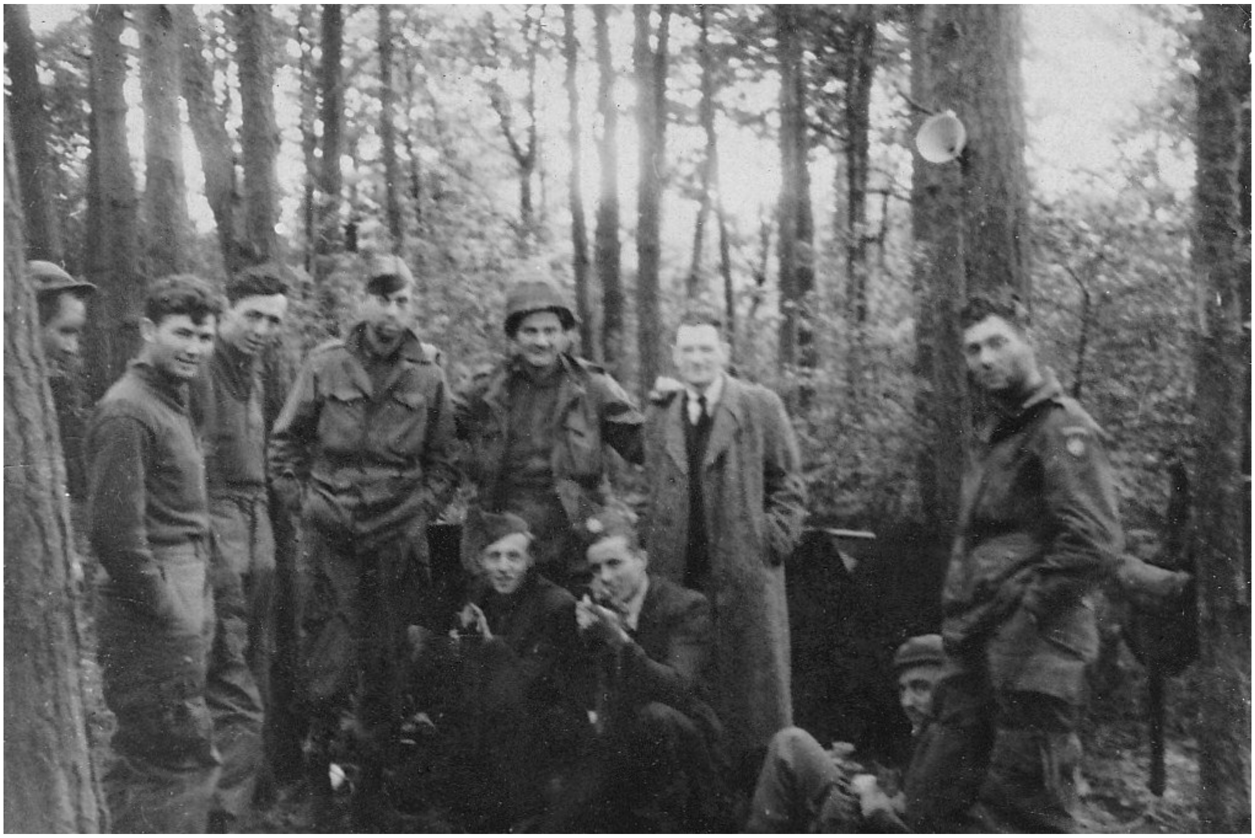
The airborne troops have made themselves comfortable in the camp at the Beerze in Hertenkamp and have a bite to eat sitting under their tarpaulin shelter. An American M1 Garand, a semi-automatic rifle, lies within easy reach. In the middle is Pfc Robert Gommoll, the trooper to his right bears the patch of the 101st Airborne Division. (Dekker family)



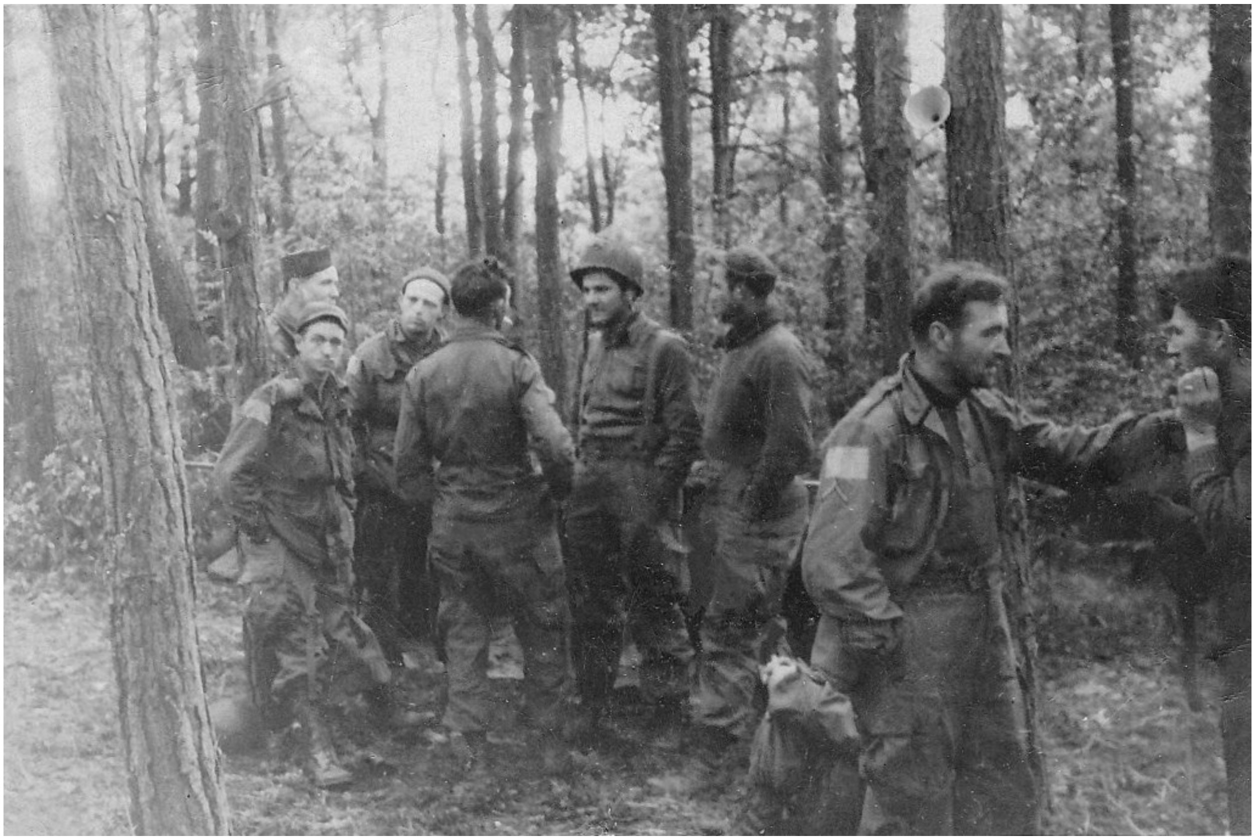
The so-called kitchen in Hertenkamp. Central in the photo is a milk churn in which the food was concealed to be transported to the Kampina. By this and wearing farmers' overalls the true nature of a bike journeys into the forest was disguised. The rear wheel of a bicycle is just visible to the left, together with some boxes and baskets in which food was also being transported. Co-pilot 2/Lt Witney Brooks is visible in one of the shelters in the background built from the large tarpaulin from the German Army medical supply depot WVA in Oisterwijk. (Dekker family)



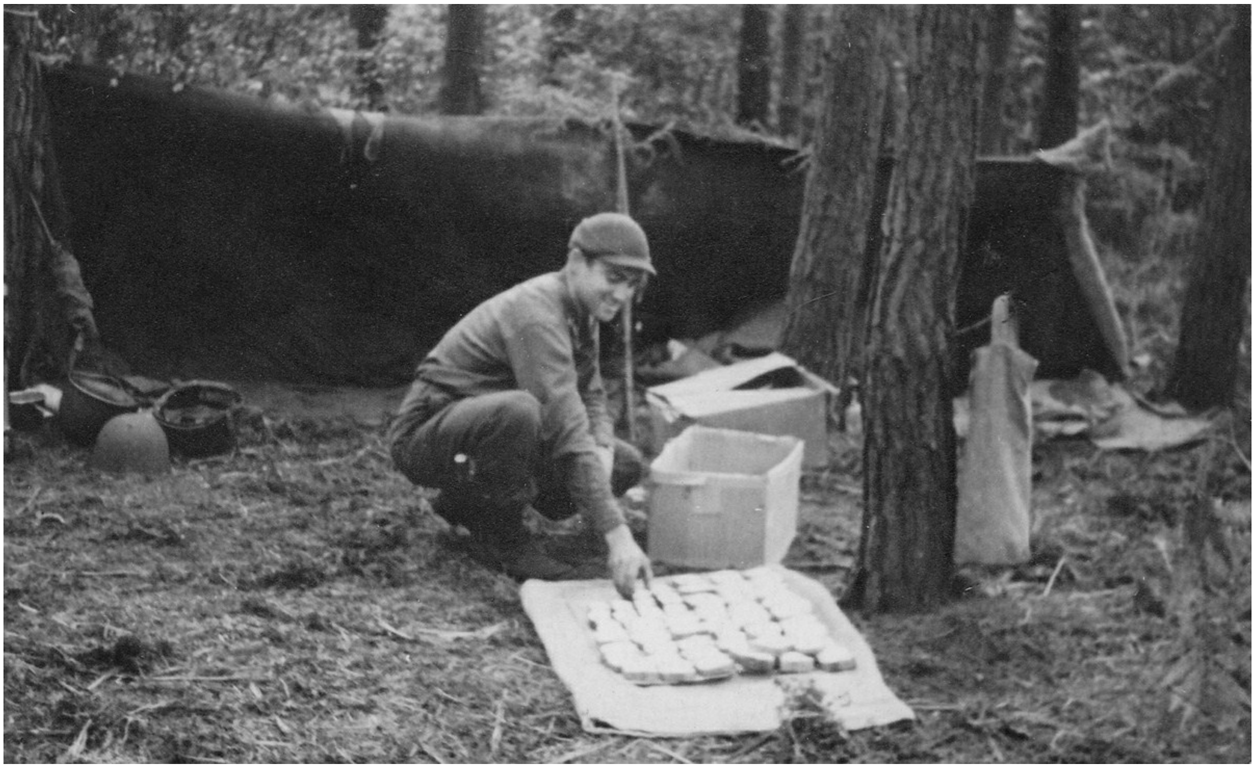
Twenty American airborne troops from different gliders with a number of their helpers under the trees in Hertenkamp. Lower left is Sjef de Jong, in the back of the group (with beard) stands glider pilot F/O Arthur Moss. (Dekker family)



A number of American airborne troops with three of their helpers. The man with the long coat and tie is the Jew Louis Katan, alias “Wim Fransen.” To the left of the trooper with the helmet is F/O Arthur Moss. Sitting on the left is Marinus Verhagen, to his right is Sjef de Jong, both of them holding a weapon. The soldier on the far right bears the shoulder patch of the 82nd Airborne Division. (Dekker family)

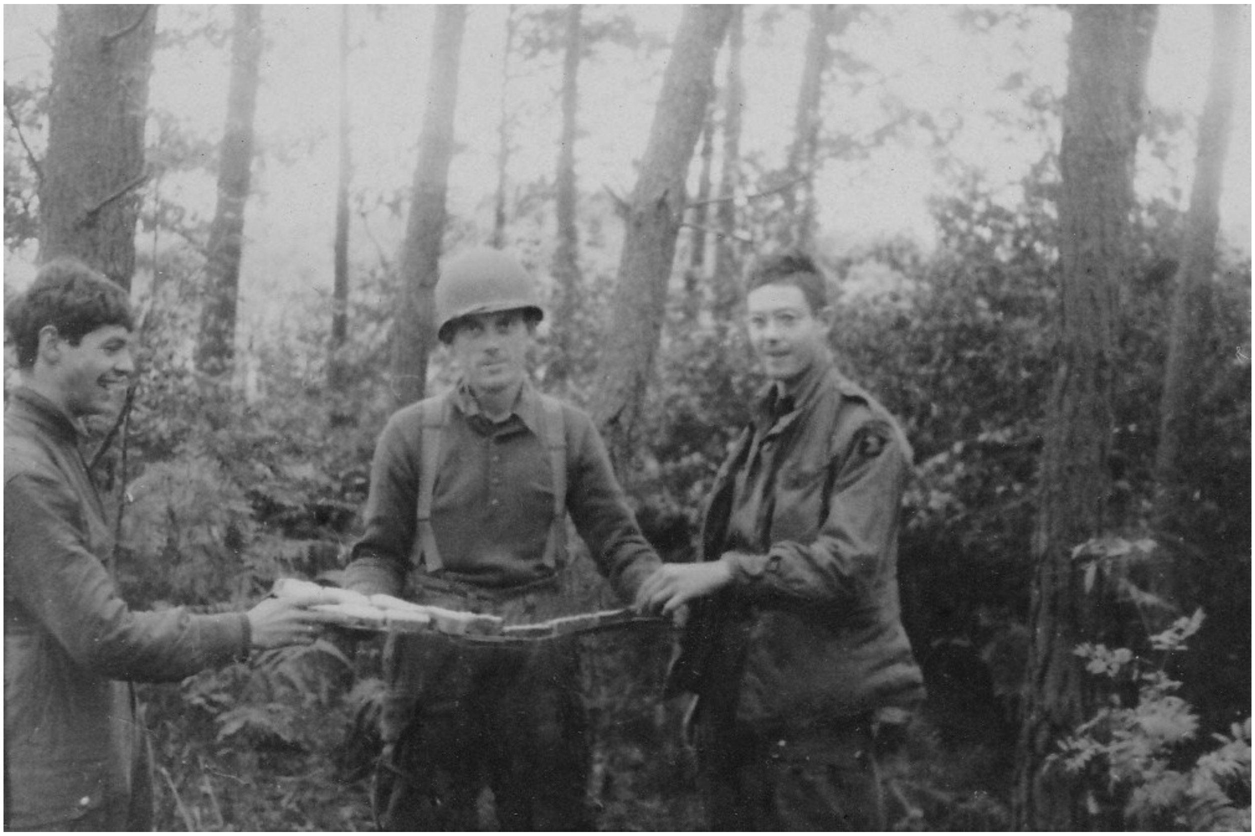


A group photo of the American airborne troops in Hertenkamp. The trooper on the front right wears a private first class's stripes and the American flag on his sleeve. (Dekker family)

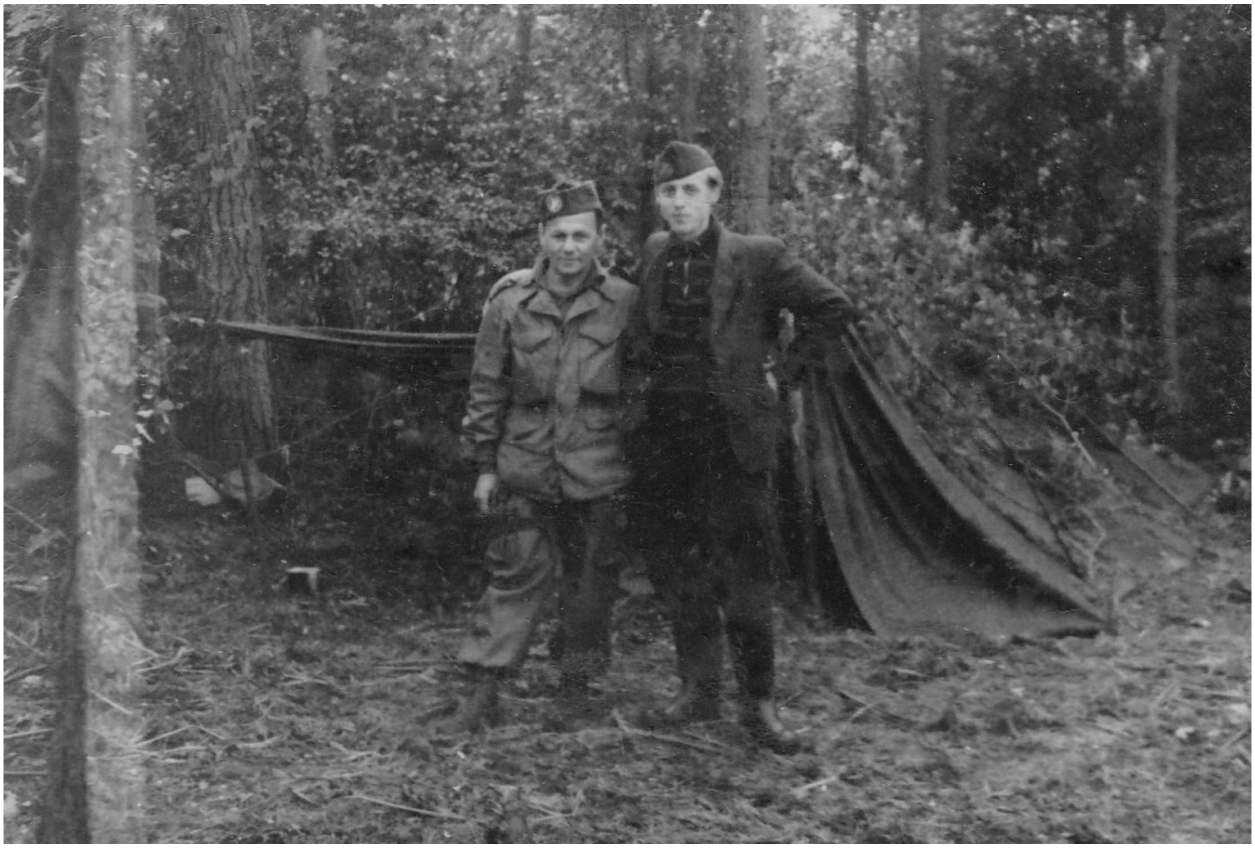


Dividing the bread in the camp in Hertenkamp by glider pilot 2/Lt James Luton, who landed prematurely in the hamlet of Nergena. In the back a large temporary shelter made of tent canvas strung between the trees can be seen. (Dekker family)

Glider pilot F/O Arthur F. Moss. This picture was taken shortly after October 24, 1944. (Bill Moss)



S/Sgt Junior Pruett shares bread around the camp. On the left is Pfc Robert Gommoll. The trooper with glasses wears the patch of the 101st Airborne Division on his shoulder. (Dekker family)



On the right is Marinus Verhagen with the American sergeant Joseph Casey in front of one of the shelters. Sgt Casey was one of the 11 troops from the Waco glider of F/O James G. Cleary. He landed his glider prematurely on September 19 at Bergenshuizen, along the Scheepersdijk. (Dekker family)

Chapter 9
DISCOVERED BY THE GERMANS

Confrontations with the enemy

Although the airborne troops felt safe in their new shelter, their continued stay in this area was certainly not without danger. Taking into account the number of gliders that had been found in the area by the Germans since mid-September, they must have realized that there should be many enemy troops at large and hiding in the area. They did, however, not make any attempt to mount any search for the airborne troops in the forest of the Kampina. The Germans in the vicinity of Boxtel had gradually become all too aware that the war for them would probably not last much longer, so presumably they did not feel obliged to take any undue risks at this late stage. Moreover, the real German combat troops were on the front line near the corridor fighting the Allied landings, and the kind of German soldiers remaining behind were, generally, older or second class troops.

Still there were Germans who kept an eye out for Dutch citizens suspected of assisting in the hiding of any Allied soldiers in and around the Kampina. One of those under suspicion was forester Aalt van den Ham. Van den Ham had two Dutch men hiding in his house and when one day he went out into the forest with one of them, suddenly five German soldiers appeared, stopping them and demanding that they produce their identity documents. Van den Ham had the correct papers with him and so was allowed to continue, but the man with him who he had sheltered had no papers and so was held. That man came from the village of Stadskanaal and whilst being questioned the Germans noticed how nervous he was and that he didn’t speak with the local “Brabant's” tongue. This made them suspicious and it didn’t take long for him to admit to being in hiding and he subsequently told the Germans where he had been sheltered. The Germans then took him with them and went to Van den Ham’s house, Huize Kampina, where the man managed to escape through the back door and disappear into the dense forest. The other man who had been hiding there saw the Germans approaching from a distance and also quickly escaped. The German soldiers were furious and thoroughly searched through the entire house and annexes while the forester’s wife, his daughter Annie, and a family friend, a woman who had been visiting the family, remained in the house. Eventually they found Aalt van den Ham’s pistol, two German machine gun barrels, Allied leaflets, and a parachute that had been used for a weapons supply drop.

The discovery of the parachute made the Germans suspect that Van den Ham was hiding an Allied pilot and, threatening his wife, daughter, and the visitor, ordered them to say where “Der Tommy” was hiding. However, the three remained calm and insisted they knew nothing. The Germans then let the woman go and sent the daughter away to find and fetch her father, while keeping his wife under arrest in the house.

In the meantime Klaas Dekker and Grard and Door van der Meijden were on their way back from the airborne troops’ hideout. That day Grard had taken food to the camp and his wife Door had accompanied him. With two backpacks full of sugar and jam the couple had travelled to the Kampina. In the event that they were stopped at a German checkpoint they would tell them they were on their way for a picnic. The two had arrived at the camp without any problem and on their arrival they had been greeted enthusiastically by the troops. By now these men looked pretty rough from living in the open for the past couple of weeks, unable to wash and shave properly.

When Dekker and the Van der Meijdens were returning to Boxtel and approaching Huize Kampina, they were suddenly stopped by two German soldiers. Armed with machine guns the Germans instructed the threesome to put their hands in the air. One of the Germans, an NCO, walked up to Dekker pointing his gun and ordered him to show his identity card. Dekker took his portfolio from his inside pocket, opened it, took out his identity card and gave it to the German. While the soldier continued to frisk Dekker’s body he asked, in German, “Wann geboren?” (when borne). Dekker replied “November 16, 1909,” and was given his identity card back. While his trouser pockets were being thoroughly searched by the German, Dekker managed to remove a small weapon from his inside jacket pocket. While the German searched amongst all kinds of knick-knacks from his trouser pockets, Dekker slipped the weapon, with its holster, quickly into his portfolio and put his arms in the air. The German then proceeded to search the pockets of his jacket and his overcoat. All the time Dekker kept his arms firmly in the air. The German did not find anything and then continued to search Grard Van der Meijden.

While the threesome was being searched, the other German kept his machine gun aimed at them. Finally, with the German finding nothing, the three were allowed to pass and continue their journey. When they passed Aalt van den Ham’s house a little further down the road, two Germans were just leaving. When one of them saw the trio passing he immediately instructed them to halt. Klaas Dekker didn’t waste any time informing the German that they had been checked and searched already and bravely continued his walk with Grard and Door.

About 330 yards (300m) further on, they met the woman who had just been sent away from the forester’s house by the Germans. She told them she had been visiting the family when the Germans raided the house, and said that the Germans were looking for Aalt van den Ham. Trying to avoid attracting suspicion the four continued strolling on while the woman informed them that the forester was suspected of having provided accommodation to English pilots. Because Van den Ham was not at home, the Germans had announced that they intended to shoot his wife and daughter if they couldn’t get hold of him.

A little further down the road the four coincidentally bumped into Aalt van den Ham who, totally unaware of the developing events, came walking along a forest path. They quickly warned him of the German raid on his home, and, while the woman continued on her way home, Klaas, Grard, and Door took Van den Ham to the airborne troop’s hideout, passing through all kinds of roads and paths. While van Ham was taken to the hideout, the two Germans soldiers who were searching the area around the house, had detained a local farmer, who was stopped and had to produce his identity documents. The German soldiers asked him where he had come from and the farmer explained that he had been feeding his horse in a nearby pasture. Suspicious, as usual, the two German soldiers set out to accompany the farmer, on bike, back to his pasture to verify his story.

Soon after the two Germans left with the farmer the forester’s son, Jan van den Ham, together with his girlfriend, arrived at the house. He found his mother under arrest but, inventing an excuse to evade suspicion of being the son of the forester, he quickly told one of the Germans that they both were friends of the family and had come to visit. The German believed his excuse and without checking their identity sent them away.

Meanwhile the Van der Meijden couple, Dekker, and Aalt van den Ham had arrived at the airborne camp. They told the men what had happened, and that the forester’s wife and daughter were in serious danger. The airborne troops instantly set out for a confrontation with the Germans. With 16 men, led by S/Sgt John Burke and followed by Klaas Dekker and Jan Kwant, the group set out in force to the forester’s home. While the Germans were still busy with their search of the house, the airborne troops stealthily approached Huize Kampina in accordance with their military training. Well camouflaged and armed with their automatic weapons, carbines, pistols, and hand grenades the men approached to within 110 yards (100m) of the house where they hid themselves out of sight by sliding into a large and deep ditch.

The two Germans soldiers who had taken the farmer back to his pasture had verified his story and were just returning to the area of Van den Ham’s house on their bikes. They spotted a few Americans from the group just before they had managed to all disappear into the ditch. Leaving their bikes behind they carefully crawled up towards the ditch until close enough to observe the Americans. Then, suddenly, they started firing their machine guns at random, aiming generally in the direction of the airborne troops. The Americans immediately returned fire and a brief exchange of fire took place. The two Germans quickly realized the hopelessness of their situation, and ran off in the direction of the forester’s house.

The airborne troops had no idea how many Germans were in the house, and because they wanted to avoid a second confrontation the group cautiously retreated to their camp. Before doing so, however, they took the two bikes and ammunition left behind by the German soldiers. When the men had arrived back in their camp, it was decided that, after a short interlude, somebody should return to the house to assess the situation. Van den Ham was obviously very anxious to know what had happened to his wife and daughter after the two fleeing Germans had disappeared in the direction of his house.

Gabriël Sauer went out to reconnoitre Huize Kampina and soon discovered that the Germans had left the house in a hurry. Sauer found Van den Hams’ wife and daughter safe. He told the anxious woman that her husband was safe in the woods with the airborne troops and that they didn't need to worry about him. Gabriël found the two German machine gun barrels, the Allied leaflets and the parachute that the Germans had collected on the ground in front of the house, they had left all these behind when they had departed in their state of panic. However they had taken Van den Hams’ pistol and watch, and Klaas Dekker’s bike, which he had left in the forester’s shed, had also been taken by the fleeing Germans.

Gabriël Sauer returned to the Americans' camp and explained what he had found at the forester's house. Klaas Dekker was certain that Germans could be expected to take reprisal action against the forester and his family so it was decided that the wife and daughter, plus some of their household items, their clothing, and some of their more important bits and pieces would be taken to a safe address. That evening most of this was removed from the house by Gabriël Sauer, farmer Willem de Groot, and Van hen Ham's wife and daughter, and transported to De Groot's farm. Aalt van den Ham went with Klaas Dekker to his house in the Ons Doelstraat in Boxtel and then, early the following morning, while it was still dark, everyone returned to Huize Kampina to retrieve the rest. While the De Groot and Van den Ham families were struggling with the pieces of furniture, Klaas Dekker and Gabriël Sauer kept a lookout at a nearby crossroads. At first light everyone left the area, fearing the Germans would return there at any time. Aalt van den Ham, Gabriël Sauer, and Klaas Dekker went to the airborne camp while Aalt's wife and daughter went with the De Groot's to their farm.

Certainly it was not long before the Germans did reappear, this time with a force of some 40 men who headed up to the house. Once there they destroyed everything inside and then set the house, barn and wood shed on fire. The German soldiers also caught and killed a number of chickens and took the farmer's pig away. The family's carefully hidden pieces of furniture were found by the Germans and completely destroyed. All that remained of the house and the surrounding buildings was a total ruin. After this retaliation the German soldiers remained in the area for some time, but they didn't dare venture into the forest.

Aalt van den Ham went into hiding with the parents of Door van der Meijden in Esch while his wife and children were accommodated somewhere else. As one of the conditions imposed before he could go into hiding in Esch, Grard van der Meijden insisted that Aalt had to shave off his beard and moustache so as to try to make himself unrecognizable. This seemed to work because one day in Esch Van den Ham bumped into a neighbor, a policeman, with whom he had been very friendly, and who failed to recognise him.

The remains of Huize Kampina, forester Aalt van den Ham's family home. The house and its adjacent buildings were burned down by the Germans. (G. Segers)

Now that the food supply for the airborne troops through Huize Kampina had become impossible, they had to look for a different transit point. The helpers found a solution by provisionally diverting the food supply through the nearby farms of Willem de Groot and Leo Kurstjens. Leo's farm was called Hoeve Banisveld, and was located at the Koevoortseweg in Lennisheuvel.

These farms became the third and fourth food supply distribution points that had been used since the troops had landed. A major problem with this new site, however, was that the Germans had positioned an artillery gun along the road connecting Boxtel with the two farms and everyone who wanted to pass the position was thoroughly checked by them. However, after Allied artillery shells had landed nearby on a couple of occasions the gun was relocated to a different position in the area two days later. This cleared the road again and the food supply situation became relatively stable once more.

Both farms were only about a 20 minutes' walk from the camp on the other side of the Beerze stream. The road leading to the camp was well covered by forestation, enabling the helpers to move there virtually unseen by anybody.

The son of Leo Kurtsjens, Theo, and his friend Jan van Houtum, frequently helped with delivering the food supply to the camp. To reach the camp they had to cross the Beerze and, depending on sluice gates at the water mill located 3 miles (5km) away in the village of Spoordonk, the water was running or standing still, and so alternated between deep and shallow. To ensure that the Beerze could be crossed at all times, Theo and Jan constructed a bridge composed of green pine wood. This bridge however, was so heavy and solid that the boys could barely handle it.

Farm Balsvoort

Not far from the airborne camp was the hamlet of Balsvoort, where there was a farm of the same name occupied by the widow Schut and her sons and daughters. Two of her sons, Hein and Theo, were in contact with the local resistance, and, as a consequence, had regularly hidden people on the farm. While the Americans stayed in their camp, which was less than 550 yards (500m) from Balsvoort, Hein helped some members of the resistance deliver food to them.

At the beginning of October Hein was hiding a few people close to the farm including some evacuees from the village of Oirschot, among whom was Hein’s brother, Bernard, and his family. The Schut family had previously shown sympathy for the Oisterwijk resistance group by agreeing to hide people on their farm who were wanted by the Germans. The Oisterwijk resistance group had recently captured a number of German soldiers in the woods around Oisterwijk and, after disarming them, had also imprisoned them on the Balsvoort farm.

The presence of these German prisoners, however, created great disorder on the farm amongst the other people in hiding, and soon a major disagreement arose as to what to do with these prisoners. Executing them was extremely risky because of the obvious retaliation that would occur should those in hiding and their helpers be arrested or taken prisoner. It was therefore decided to release the German soldiers. They were first blindfolded and then led around the Kampina for some time, to confuse them, after which they were released far away from Balsvoort. Unfortunately it didn’t take them long to find their way back to their own troops in Oisterwijk and raise the alarm. One way or the other the German soldiers must have been able to establish where they had been held during their captivity because a few days later, at about 3pm, a large German force raided the hamlet of Balsvoort and the farm.

At around the same time three Dutch men had also just arrived at the farm, on the run from the Germans since September 23, in fear of being arrested and sent for forced labour in Germany. They were the 23-year-old Jan van Woerden and his two friends Piet van der Meer and Martin Wassenaar, all from Lisse in the province of south Holland. After wandering around the country they had finally ended up in the village of Haaren on September 30. Here they had stayed for one night, hiding on the farm of farmer Van der Sande, next to the Catholic Church. On Sunday October 1 they were guided to the Kampina by the farmer's son, Jan van der Sande, and were accommodated in one of the small wooden shacks that were scattered about the Kampina, some of which were also used by local members of the resistance. Together with some resistance people the three friends remained there, in hiding, for a few days.

Later that week they were taken to the Balsvoort farm by some resistance members, where they were welcomed by the widow and her son Bernard and invited to sit down at the kitchen table for a meal. They had just sat around the table when suddenly the German soldiers appeared, raiding the Balsvoort farm and its surrounding buildings. The Germans, led by an Oberfeldwebel (sergeant first class) and a Feldwebel (sergeant), had the farm completely surrounded. They called out, in German, "raus, raus" (get out, out), upon which everyone left the farm building. Bernard quickly dived out, via the kitchen, into the barn and vanished. The three friends from Lisse could not escape and were driven out and put against a wall of a building opposite the farm.

While the widow Schut stood in the doorway and nonchalantly asked what in the world was going on, the men were being interrogated at the gun point, a machine gun aimed at them. Jan van Woerden was standing close to the corner of the building and began to look around to see if he could flee, however a German pointed his submachine gun at Jan, telling him not to try to do anything or else he would be shot. At that moment Piet van der Meer did something that probably saved their lives. Piet was fluent in German and told their interrogators that they should not shoot because the three were actually working for the Germans. The German soldiers were so surprised to hear this revelation that they decided that they had no option but to take them back to Oisterwijk for questioning.

Soon afterwards the men were led away, on foot, destined for the headquarters of the German Luftwaffe in hotel in Oisterwijk. Before leaving Balvoort with their prisoners, the Germans stopped at the last farm on the edge of the hamlet as the Feldwebel was not feeling well and demanded that some water be fetched for him. Jan and his friends were ordered to sit down on the grass and not to move. This provided Jan with an opportunity to get rid of his identity papers which he still had in his pocket. While sitting Jan made a hole in the ground with the heel of his shoe, and put his papers into the hole which he covered with sand. A short while later their journey resumed and the three Dutchmen, surrounded by their German guards, walked on to Oisterwijk.

The Balsvoort farm of the Schut family in the hamlet of Balsvoort. Balsvoort was located at the edge of the Kampina, not far from the camp of the airborne troops at the stream Beerze. (L.A.M. van Houtum)

When they arrived at the hotel in Oisterwijk, Jan, Martin, and Piet were feeling nervous but they did everything they could to hide this from the Germans. They asked Piet how and where he had learned to speak German so well, upon which Piet told them that he had worked for the German drivers corps NSKK, Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps, which was correct. With his unit he had provided transports for the Wehrmacht and Piet van der Meer had served for some time at the Russian front. After returning to Holland for respite he had decided not to go back to Russia and instead went into hiding. As a test another Dutch NSKK employee was introduced to Piet; this man came from a nearby unit located at the edge of the Oisterwijk woods. As they did not know each other, the Germans grew ever more suspicious of Van der Meer's lie, and the three men were put in a room to be interrogated. Piet asked the Oberfeldwebel whether they could get something to eat as they were hungry. The Oberfeldwebel said he first needed to ask for approval from his superior, and left the room.

The approval being obtained, he led the men to the kitchen part of the hotel where a Feldwebel was in charge. When told to give the men something to eat, he promptly refused as, in his opinion, the three were partisans who should be shot immediately instead of being fed. Being senior in rank, the Oberfeldwebel ordered the Feldwebel to keep his opinions to himself and give the men something to eat. Begrudgingly, the three men were given some soup and when they had eaten sufficiently the Oberfeldwebel led them away from the kitchen.

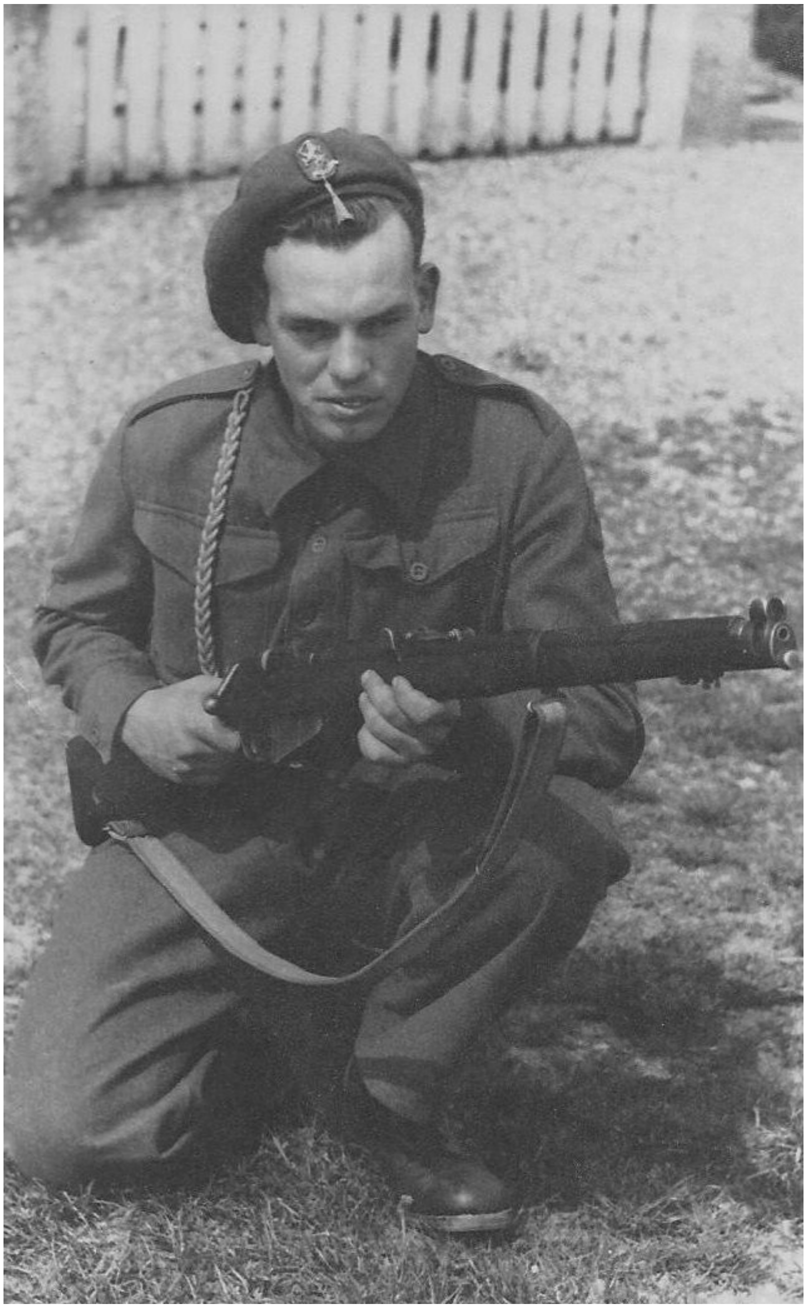
However, he did not return them to the room where they had come from but instead left the building with them. He led them to two bikes that were leaned against a wall and said that Jan and his friends were to follow him to the outer fence. The Oberfeldwebel took the two bikes and the four walked out into the street in front of the building. When they arrived at the gate a brief conversation followed between the guard and the German NCO, and the gate was opened. The four men left the hotel grounds and walked some distance down the adjacent road until they were around a corner and out of sight of the building. Here the German instructed the three friends that they should disappear in one direction while he would take the bikes in the opposite direction. Although puzzled they did not need long to ponder the situation and quickly set off on foot in the direction of Oisterwijk. They were very lucky to be released and free again and passed through Oisterwijk on their way to Tilburg. Why the Oberfeldwebel released Jan and his two friends will always remain a mystery. Perhaps it was in thanks to Piet van der Meer's excuse about the NSKK.

In Tilburg they were put up overnight by friends of Piet. The next day the three were walking through Tilburg when Jan van Woerden noticed that they were being followed by a German on a small motorcycle. When he looked more closely, he discovered to his dismay that it was the brutish Feldwebel who had become ill on the road from Balsvoort to the hotel. Jan guessed that he had come to search for them after learning that the Oberfeldwebel had let them go the previous day.

Jan warned his two friends not to look back and on the very first opportunity the three men slipped into a narrow alley. This alley opened to the back of some buildings where the German could not pass with his motorcycle. When the three men left the alley at a different spot, the Feldwebel was no longer anywhere to be seen, so they quickly disappeared into one of the many Tilburg streets.

Soon afterwards Jan, Piet, and Martin left the town and walked towards the south. By evening they had arrived at a farm on the outskirts of the village of Hilvarenbeek, 6 miles (10km) southeast of Tilburg. This farm was the home of the Van Gestel family – two brothers and their older sister – and here Jan, Piet, and Martin were given some freshly baked bread to eat. After having eaten the three men were taken to the hayloft where they spent that night sleeping in the hay.

The next morning, they were informed that, overnight, the region had been liberated by Allied forces. Apparently they had slept so solidly that they had not noticed that the front line had passed by in the middle of the night. From the newly-liberated Hilvarenbeek the three friends travelled to Eindhoven where they were accommodated in a camp for Dutch refugees, located on the grounds of the Phillips factories.



A photo of Jan van Woerden during his military service, taken in May 1945 in Lisse. At this time Jan van Woerden was attached to the First Canadian Army. The weapon he is holding is a standard model Lee-Enfield 0.303 caliber. (J. van Woerden)

When the three friends had been arrested in Balsvoort, the Germans had also arrested Hein Schut and he too was taken to the hotel in Oisterwijk. Bernard Schut had tried to get away via the shed next to the kitchen, but was pursued by the Germans who caught up with him in the forest. They shot Bernard as he ran away from them, rolled him into a shallow pit, and covered his body with leaves. On the night of his arrest, Hein Schut was interrogated and tortured in the basement of hotel Bos en Ven. Along with another Oisterwijk inhabitant called Gijs Schellen, he was executed the following day, Saturday October 7.

Discovered by the Germans

The Americans had been told what had happened to the Schut brothers and, while they were very impressed with the brothers' bravery, they were all the more aware of the danger in which they found themselves. However, the weather had improved and the men began to feel more comfortable; there was a friendlier atmosphere in the camp and in hearing of experiences others had had they spent less time worrying over their own plight. But tempers got a little short here and there as all of them become weary from the waiting. The question in the minds of all was what was taking the British so long and where was Montgomery?

By now it was mid-October and for several days it had been quiet. The number of RAF sorties in the area had picked up since the weather had been good and most men got their hopes up again. The good weather had meant that some locals went out for a walk in the woods, hunting for mushrooms or collecting firewood. The helpers had been able to turn some of them in directions away from the camp and this cautioned the Americans to keep on the alert.

The path to the stream through the thick bushes had by now become a giveaway to their clearing, but from the outside the thickets around the camp would discourage a usual hiker or nature lover from accidentally stumbling in on the men. Pruett was keeping two guards out of the pathway to the stream to keep a close watch.

German soldiers had begun wandering about down the lanes making it more dangerous to get food to the troops, and around that time the Germans started to build a wooden bridge across the Beerze. This bridge was being constructed a few hundred yards away from Balsvoort and the Germans frequently talked so loudly that the troops could hear them clearly from their camp. Sauer and Verhagen couldn't resist the temptation to go and take a look at what they were doing but when the Germans discovered the two men they immediately arrested them and locked them in a nearby shed.

Fortunately they managed to escape from the shed and quickly disappeared back into the woods.

The danger that the airborne camp would be discovered by the Germans was increasing. A few days later some German soldiers who were stationed at the bridge decided to take a stroll along the Beerze. A guard by the stream saw three German soldiers headed his direction along the bank. He rushed back to warn the rest and before he could the Germans had entered the path to their clearing. Suddenly they found themselves face to face with the American guard who pointed his rifle at the man in front of him, the first in the line. The German soldier turned around and the others turned with him, they then walked slowly back out of the path towards the stream. The Germans were scared out of their wits and ran away without firing a shot. Neither did the guard or any other American shoot after them, fearing that it would make too much noise and alert other Germans. The Americans didn’t know whether the guard was the only one the front man had seen but he seemed to have taken the whole site in with his glance. Nevertheless, he did not get far enough inside to see the tarpaulin and all the other things scattered about. The men realized that they had been discovered and hastily left their camp. They followed the Beerze downstream and a few hundred yards deeper into the dense forest they regrouped and hid.

Later that day Grard van der Meijden and Louis Katan were waiting with bread at the De Groot farm for Klaas Dekker, Sjef de Jong, and Jan Kwant to arrive with the other food supplies. Once these three men arrived at the farm everything was transferred in a wheelbarrow and Klaas, Sjef, and Jan set off for the camp. They followed the main road to the forest as if nothing was going on, because that was always the best way: the bolder, the better. On their journey, Sjef told the others of his trip with some pork and a boiler to the camp that afternoon. Having arrived he found everything so quiet and empty that he thought it to be rather strange. The few airborne troops present said nothing and simply ignored his presence.

The men were not happy about the situation and took a detour to avoid having to pass the moorland. They followed a route with lots of vegetation so they could not easily been seen by anybody working in the forest. When they approached the camp, Jan Kwant remained behind with the wheelbarrow packed with bread, ham, and other supplies, while Sjef de Jong and Klaas Dekker continued their approach to the camp. At the camp they only found four troops who explained what had happened. One of them was on guard with instructions to immediately shoot any German soldier that appeared near the camp. Another was drinking the last of the milk in the churn because he did not want to leave any behind for the Germans.

Sjef de Jong took the two milk churns back to Jan Kwant while Dekker and the three soldiers dragged away all the material that had been left behind in the camp. The men took with them the small tent panels and anything that they could possibly use to protect their bodies against the cold. The ammunition that had been left behind and that could not be carried with them was temporarily buried. The large tarpaulin and some smaller panels were hidden a hundred yards away in the dense bushes, so they could be retrieved later. Dekker and the four troops then went looking for the new location that the Americans had moved to.

By now these were very well concealed and positioned in such a way that a successful German attack was almost impossible. Once safely in their midst, Dekker told S/Sgt Burke, S/Sgt Pruett, and Pte Fitchner that he had to go and find out what had happened to Jan Kwant and Sjef de Jong and that he would return to the troops later. By nightfall Dekker had left the troops and was on the road. In the sand he found the tracks of the wheelbarrow and the boy’s footsteps so he knew they had passed this way, but Dekker wanted to know for sure. Taking a shortcut by small trails through the forest he soon reached the farm of De Groot. There it became clear that the two men had left the wheelbarrow with the bread and ham at the farm and had gone home. Dekker left a message for his wife with the farmer reassuring her that everything was OK and then returned to the airborne troops.

The second camp in the Kampina

After retracing his steps, Dekker found the airborne troops hideout. Because Dekker thought that they still were too close to the Germans, he persuaded them to search for yet another hiding place before night was out. Initially the Americans wanted to remain where they were but Dekker insisted that they look for a different place, further away from their current position. The Americans continued to be reluctant until Dekker made it clear he would leave and not return again if they continued in their intransigence. The Americans took this warning to heart and agreed to relocate.

The group then set off north, across the moorland to the other side of the Kampina, in search of safer quarters. Once they had found a suitable spot to stay for the night, Klaas Dekker, S/Sgt John Burke, and ten troops returned to collect the large tarpaulin and the other panels. The transportation of the tarpaulin presented quite a problem and, it being too bulky, they had to drop it after just a few feet. Burke grumbled and wanted to leave it behind, but after some thinking and rethinking a way was found to transport the nearly 9 yards (8m) long tarpaulin. It was rolled up lengthways and, with eight men to support it, was carried forward on their shoulders, looking like a caterpillar with long legs. It was a funny sight; Burke still grumbled but was forced to accept the situation.

After a few rests the men arrived at the overnight stop with the salvaged materials and fell exhausted onto the ground. The next morning S/Sgt Pruett went out to explore the area and found, approximately 165 yards (150m) from their current location, an excellent place to establish their new camp. This was located in a dense production forest, in the fens area Huisvennen. The ground in the area was very dry with a marshy area which bordered one side while a large fen and hilly area bordered the other side. It was barely visible from the air because of the dense vegetation and trees. That morning Dekker returned to the Kampina from Boxtel bringing with him Sauer and Verhagen, and they helped guide the airborne troops to the new spot. Upon their arrival the Americans decided to dig in better than they had done in their previous camp. Instead of creating shelters in shallow foxholes and under tent panels, they now excavated large foxholes of up to 16 to 20 feet (5–6m). These were then filled with straw and covered with wooden beams and the tent panels to be better protected against the cold and rain. In turn, these were then covered with pine logs and turf to act as camouflage. One foxhole in particular measured 20 by 20 feet (6x6m) and was about a waist or more in depth. The hole was already there when the men had arrived and some thought it may have been started as a gun emplacement and dug by forced labour. It was in a kind of natural place and deepened by the dirt removed being thrown around its edges. It was soon named the “Great Foxhole” by the Americans while the Dutch referred to it as the “livingroom.” There was also a firebreak ditch nearby where they scooped out holes about 1 feet (30cm) deep to let them fill with water overnight. Pine baskets were weaved to prevent cave-ins. Those who had canteens and water purification tablets could then fill the canteens and drop in a tablet to kill off the bacteria.

In the immediate vicinity of the Kampina and in Boxtel it had become an open secret among local residents that something dangerous was going on in the Kampina. The helpers were constantly in danger of arrest by the Germans in case they were caught whilst undertaking their clandestine journeys. If this should happen the chances were that it would not be only them, but also their family and relatives who would be severely punished for helping the enemy.

They had been constantly able to adapt the food supply chain whenever the Americans had been forced to change shelter or camp, and Klaas Dekker played a pivotal role here. He was one of the helpers who approached the farmers asking them to act as a link in the food supply chain. But there were also other inhabitants of Boxtel and surrounding area who were prepared to help with the food supply to the Kampina. More than once it had happened that a reliable resident from Boxtel had delivered food and/ or materials by bike, to one of the foresters living in the Kampina, or to one of the farmers involved in hiding the Allied servicemen. In this way these people had also contributed to the food supply by being able to provide small quantities of food for the airborne troops.

One of those inhabitants who had delivered some food on her bike on a number of occasions was 18-year-old Sjaan van Hees from Boxtel. Sjaan was a nurse at the St Elisabeth hospital in Tilburg and in that capacity she had been able to transport some food to Huize Kampina a few times. She was never stopped by the Germans although she frequently encountered German checkpoints, presumably this was on account of her nurse’s uniform.

After all these weeks the American troops had a great respect for Gabriël Sauer who sometimes stayed in the camp with them and shared their discomfort. At other times he returned to Boxtel as, ever since they had first met in September, Klaas had been hiding Sauer at his home in the Ons Doelstraat. Given the large number of troops, it was thanks to his help, among other things, that the men had endured this difficult period unscathed so far. Gabriël Sauer was also of great importance to the Americans because from the outset he had served as an interpreter between them and the other Dutch helpers. Marinus Verhagen was also highly respected as he had spent many days and nights in the camp, so much so that some of the airborne troops now considered him as one of their own.

Forester Wim Meijer was requested to keep away hikers and wood collectors from the area, and along with his wife he also removed all traces of the move to Huisvennen. Wim Meijer’s home was close to where the troops were now hiding and his house was used by the helpers as their fifth transit house. Sauer and Verhagen went on an old bike to the farm of De Groot to collect the bread and ham from the wheelbarrow that they had left there the day before. Klaas Dekker went out again to once more arrange the change of route for the food supply. This was highly appreciated by the Americans, who greatly admired the way they were being supported by their helpers during this difficult period.

Forester Wim Meijer. (Meijer family)

HUISVENNEN

Forester Wim Meijer's home. The house was situated close to the camp of the airborne troops at Huisvennen. (Meijer family)

Wim Meijer's home, located close to the new camp, was now used as a base to store supplies and deliver them to the troop's new shelter. Despite what had happened to Aalt van den Ham, Wim Meijer and his wife Truus cooperated fully with the plan. Wim was always ready to support the members of the resistance, despite the obvious risks for him and his wife if the Germans ever discovered that they were helping the Allied troops.

The resistance members frequently met in Wim Meijer's house to discuss their plans. Here they also met Father Janus Optatus, a Capuchin monk from the monastery in Biezenmortel. Father Optatus was Wim Meijer had informed Father Optatus about what was happening in the Kampina and some resistance members had asked him to take care of the spiritual needs of the troops. The Capuchin readily agreed and involved Chaplain Jos Sleegers from Oisterwijk in this task.

Jos Sleegers was the vicar of the Joannes Parish in Oisterwijk and a firm supporter of Oisterwijkse resistance group. As their “duikhoofd” (head of the hiding department) Sleegers was involved in finding hiding places for Jews in Oisterwijk and the surrounding area. He also acted as counsellor for the Oisterwijk resistance group and was regularly involved in the preparation of their actions. However, until now his role had never been anything other than giving advice and help planning. Because the underground activities of the chaplain were extremely important to the Oisterwijk resistance group and no one else could be charged with those duties, he had never been allowed to participate actively in any resistance activities. With the chaplain’s new duties, supporting the airborne troops, this would obviously change. From now on the Oisterwijk resistance group would also become active in supporting the airborne troops.

Meanwhile Mervin Stomberg, who had suffered injuries on F/O Moss’ glider three weeks previously, had recovered sufficiently and regained his strength. As it was intended to billet a German soldier at the address where he was being hidden by the widow in Boxtel, he had to be moved quickly. Roel Dekker went to collect him and made him promise to maintain absolute silence during their walk to the Kampina. The countryside that they were to cross was crawling with Germans so they had to be very careful. In case they were stopped at a German control point, Roel Dekker would show forged papers stating that the man with him had to be accompanied to the Institute for the deaf and dumb in Sint-Michielsgestel.

After approximately 2½ miles (4km), when the two had almost reached the Kampina, Stomberg asked whether he was now finally allowed to speak. Roel permitted him, upon which Stomberg took off the old shoes that he had been provided with in Boxtel and showed him that his feet were bleeding due to some nails protruding through the heels of his shoes. Stomberg, however, had followed the instructions given to him and not uttered a word during his extremely painful journey. Including Stomberg the group now consisted of 43 American airborne troops.

The days that followed were quiet although from time to time a few Germans came near the camp. Warned by the guards around the camp, everybody was as quiet as possible. To meet their spiritual needs the soldiers appealed to Father Optatus and Chaplain Sleegers who organized for a mass to be celebrated in the Kampina on Sunday morning, October 15. This mass was held in the camp and dedicated to the large group of Roman Catholics amongst the airborne troops. A table and an altar stone were supplied from the village of Haaren and transported by wheelbarrow and the necessary clothing was supplied from the village of Moergestel. A big tent that would serve as their church was cleaned by a soldier and a wooden cross, constructed by another American was placed behind the alter. With Father Optatus officiating confession was taken on the moor outside the camp and communion was also celebrated there.

The situation in Sparrenrijk

The five airborne soldiers of the British 1st Airborne Division, who had had come down by glider in Biezenmortel, were still in the Sparrenrijk forest where Cees van Leeuwen had hidden them. With the seasonal falling of leaves the natural camouflage of their hideout was rapidly diminishing and with the white tent supplied by Cees van Leeuwen as their shelter now beginning to stand out against the background, it was only a matter of time before the group would be detected by the Germans. This caused the men to start to worry very much about their safety in this, until recently, quiet environment.

Their hideout was less than 22 yards (20m) away from two forest paths which were more frequently being used by German troops. At times German soldiers had come into the forest and for no apparent reason had occasionally fired their weapons. Considering this it was probably a miracle that the men had not yet been discovered. The two Jeeps also remained undiscovered and were still hidden in the same spot. This was a few hundred metres from the headquarters of the German 59th Infantry Division, under GenLt Walter Poppe and his staff.

On September 28 Poppe had requisitioned villa Huize Leeuwenrode and the nearby villa Den Eikenhorst for German use. His staff had moved into Den Eikenhorst where they set up a communications center and the general went to live in Huize Leeuwenrode; Cees van Leeuwen and his family were force to leave their home. With all available manpower the family had worked feverishly to clear the house as they were given only a few hours to remove their possessions and valuables from it. Since their eviction the family had been accommodated on the nearby farm owned by the Van de Ven family. Hardly had they settled in when the peace of the farm was rudely interrupted by the arrival of a batch of German soldiers. This German unit announced its arrival with ferocious shouting and swearing aimed at a few hard toiling horses, and promptly set about installing a field kitchen at the farm. The Feldwebel did his best to counteract the poor impression made so far by using the words of his general, emphasizing that there were also decent Germans to be found, and that he would attempt to demonstrate this in due course.

From then on the Germans avoided disturbing the two families and remained outside as much as possible. The next morning an Obergefreiter (corporal) addressed Cees van Leeuwen with the simple question “do you speak English?” Cees, who had studied Law in Utrecht, told him that he was fluent in English, upon which the German confided to him that he preferred to speak English with him, because then they were “more free.” In the ensuing days the Obergefreiter went further and gave Cees interesting details about his lifetime. He told him that his name was Tony Gebel and that he was Serbian by birth but now possessed Austrian nationality. He was an intelligent man who had studied in England, Russia, and Poland and, up until the time of his enlistment in the army, he had been a lecturer in Art History at the University of Jena. He even offered to teach Cees and his brothers about Dutch Art History, so soon their conversations became confidential.

However, the brothers were suspicious and wondered why he appeared to trust them so much. Why was it that he told them that he had occupied a high position in the German general staff? Why did he tell them that he had attended meetings between Hitler and Mussolini, where the two had apparently cursed one another in a manner that he had never heard before? And why did he reveal that he had apparently been suspected of participation in the recent attack on Hitler, on July 20, and had even been arrested (the charges were dismissed by the Court Martial for lack of evidence). He had however been reduced in rank from Oberleutnant (1st lieutenant) to Obergefreiter.

Meanwhile the care for the five airborne soldiers had to continue as usual. This could not be allowed to stagnate, despite these men being hidden only five minutes walking distance away. It was becoming increasingly difficult to ensure that the Germans would not notice that one or more of the Dutch people at the farm disappeared at regular times loaded with bags of food. At times they walked casually from the yard heavily laden and surrounded by the Germans, while at other times they would cautiously sneak out through the back door. On the other hand the presence of the field kitchen made life much easier for the boys; the food problem for the troops was effectively solved by the abundant availability of food.

In the German field kitchen food was being prepared for the German troops who were fighting along the front lines at Schijndel and Veghel, and Tony (the English-speaking corporal) insisted that they should tell him if they lacked anything. However, exactly what that was they obviously couldn’t say. Nevertheless, Tony took care that they obtained excessive quantities of foodstuffs. With a benevolent smile everything was gratefully accepted and which 2/Lt Janusz Szegda and his men, with broad grins on their faces, enjoyed eating half a day later. How they appreciated the arrival of that German field kitchen!

Tony spoke to the Van Leeuwen brothers about the other Germans in the field kitchen and warned them against the Feldwebel. Tony behaved quite correctly, sometimes even over-courteously, although the inhabitants of the farm showed him clearly what they thought about their current situation. Amongst the kitchen staff were a Czech, an easy-going Bayern (Munich), and one from Alsace Lorraine. The latter actually once belonged to the French Army, but had been forced to fight on the German side.

The farmers’ family allowed them to use the barn at any time and at times they spent long evenings in there. With the barn lit by a small kerosene lamp, the goat ruminating in the corner, and German rifles hanging from the beams, the Germans and the Dutch boys sometimes sat around the table engaged in fierce debate. On those occasions it was virtually impossible to avoid entering into politics and the Feldwebel said he still believed in a miracle, and that the tables might turn. He conceded that, at best, the Dutch in this area might be freed by the British, but they would never succeed in crossing the River Maas and advance further into the country.

Occasionally the conversation halted to listen to the sounds of artillery fire in the distance. Those guns could remain silent for hours, and then all of a sudden burst into life. It was easy to distinguish who was doing the shooting. The German batteries normally consisted of groups of three or six guns, the English of four or eight, which fired their guns one immediately after the other.

The men experienced how the commonly endured danger could bring the different parties together. This was especially true in the evening, at around 11pm, when the nearby main road to ’s-Hertogenbosch came under artillery fire. The small bucket under the table, which was always filled with wine, was left untouched and the debate stopped. When the shells landed dangerously close to the farm, everyone inside the barn would dive to the ground and push themselves against the walls. In the ominous silence immediately after such a barrage they could hear the pieces of shrapnel ticking as it fell on the tiles, that is, if they did not penetrate the roof, while the pungent smell of cordite became mixed with the fresh evening air. Moments later, once the barrage had ceased, the conversation often resumed as if nothing had happened. The next day they would see exactly where the shells had landed.

Often Cees van Leeuwen frequently found himself mixing German and English words. After about two weeks the field kitchen departed and moved on to the former Institute “De Ruwenberg” in Sint-Michielsgestel which was being used as German barracks. However, that didn’t prevent Tony from regularly turning up with a horse and cart to supply the family with food – and at the same time also keeping the airborne troops well nourished. He often stayed on the farm for hours chatting, and was able to provide up to date news about developments on the frontline at Schijndel and Veghel.

On October 12, Gebel surprised Cees by asking what he would do if he saw British and American paratroops dropping from the sky. Feeling that he knew Gebel pretty well by now, Cees considered his answer and felt safe to answer truthfully that he would try to hide them. Gebel replied unexpectedly: “then you guys should do this more cautiously than you have done it up to now!” Dumbfounded Cees stared at him wondering what on earth he might know. Tony was smiling quietly and allowed Cees some time to recover from his surprise.

Then Cees enquired as to what Tony really meant, upon which the latter revealed that he knew exactly what was going on. Since October 4 he had noticed how somebody was regularly disappearing from the farm carrying a heavy load. Sometimes this was in the morning, at other times it was in the afternoon or the evening. One evening he had followed them, unnoticed, on their journey to the airborne troops and had eavesdropped on their conversation only a few yards from the tent. Gebel could even tell him that amongst the group there was one with a strong Slavic accent. Unnoticed he had silently returned to the farm.

During the period that Tony had been at the farm he had not revealed this information to anybody else, however, from that moment, he took care to ensure that they got sufficient supplies. Now it became clear why Tony had taken the boys into his confidence and been so open with them. They told him everything; of the two Jeeps, the adventures with the Americans, and the nightly trips. Tony gave them a lot of good advice and continued his help.

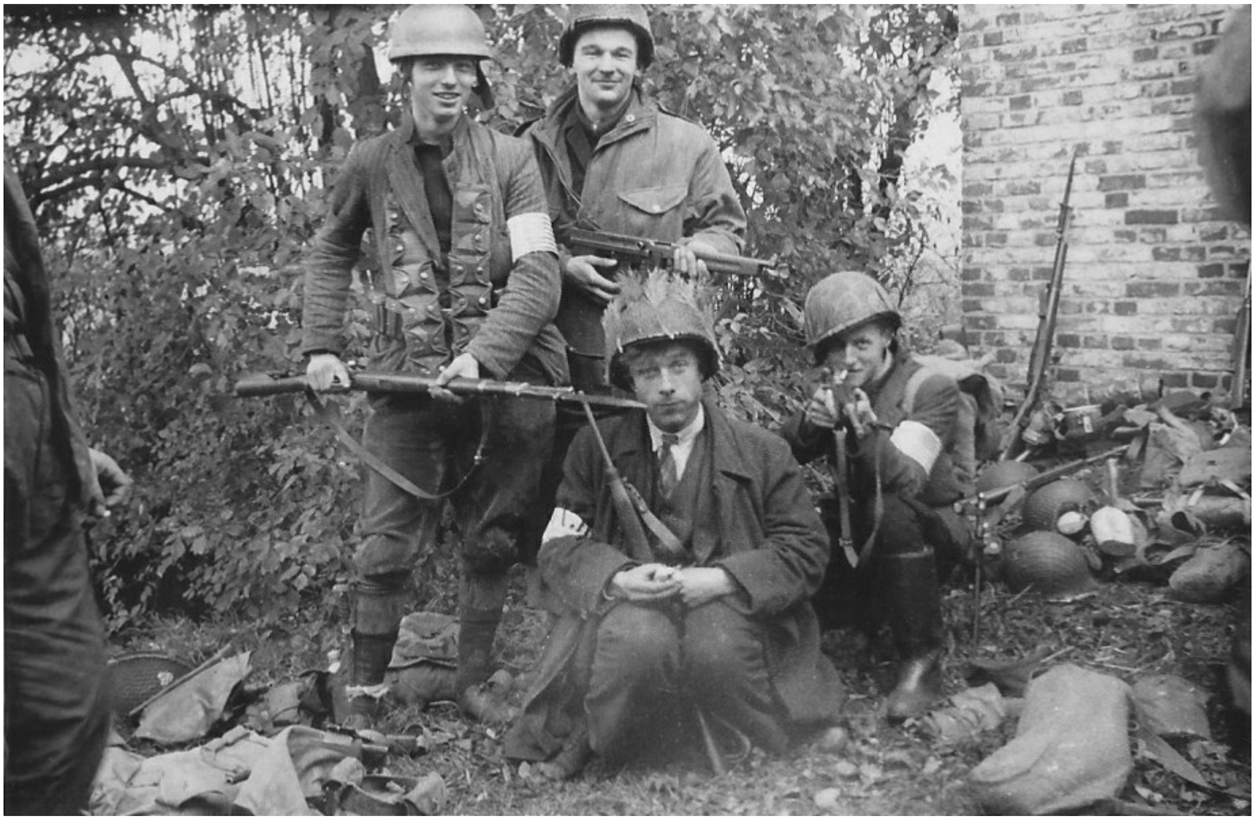
Meanwhile Cees van Leeuwen arranged for the five troops from Sparrenrijk to meet Chaplain Sleegers from Oisterwijk. They indicated to him that they felt it would be better for them to be located at the Kampina. Chaplain Sleegers then approached Klaas Dekker, informing him that five soldiers from Sparrenrijk wanted to leave their current shelter as soon as possible and join his group of Americans in the Kampina. Dekker agreed and he and Chaplain Sleegers arranged when and where to meet each other and how to move the men from Sparrenrijk to the Kampina.

On the evening of October 18 Dekker, Chaplain Sleegers, and Cees van Leeuwen went to Sparrenrijk to collect the five men. After introducing Dekker, the group left, using a route, previously explored by Cees van Leeuwen, to the Kampina. The journey was not without risk as many Germans had recently been billeted in the area. Ready to use their weapons at any time, the group stealthily passed illuminated farms that had been requisitioned by the Germans.

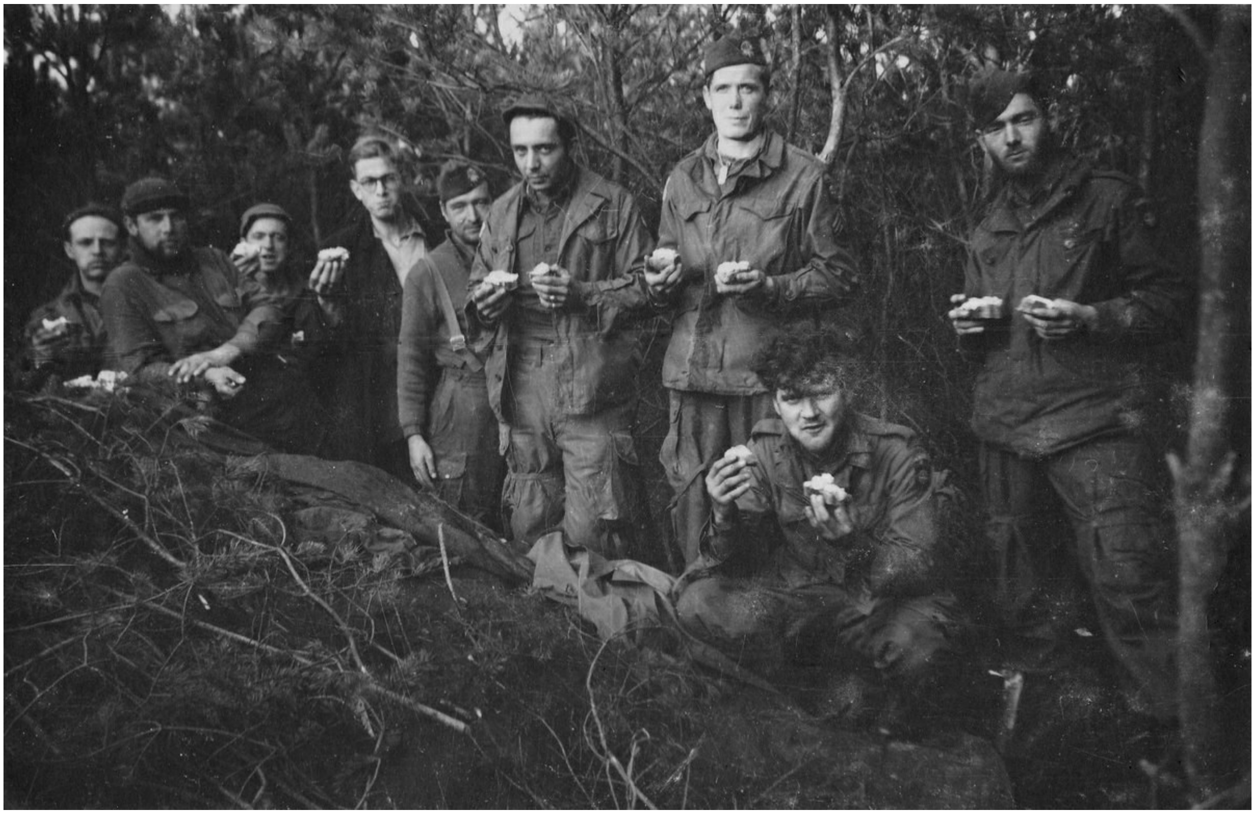
There were no problems and everything went according to plan; after a long march the men arrived tired but unscathed at the camp in Huisvennen. Here the five new members were warmly welcomed by the Americans, some of whom had already met Lt Janusz Szegda in their hideout in Bergenshuizen. With the addition of these five, the group now comprised 48 Allied airborne troops.

Dekker very excitedly told the American officers of a plan Lt Szegda had thought up to take over and destroy the German headquarters and the communications center at the villas Huize Leeuwenrode and Den Eikenhorst in Esch. Lt Szegda explained what he knew of the current situation at the villas and that it would be very easy to carry out the plan. He announced right off that he would be in command of the operation. The Americans were caught off guard by Szegda’s stance and did not like his plan for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was no possibility to connect with the allies or get a message through to their lines explaining what they intended to do. Secondly, although the group consisted of enough men, arms, and ammunition to carry out the plan with the element of surprise, there was nowhere safe for them to go after they destroyed the headquarters and communications center. Indeed, Lt Luton suggested that the Germans could set up another communications center right away and weighed against the risk of losing some or all of them, the operation could achieve nothing. He felt they needed a better reason for such an action. Every German in the area would surely be mobilized to look for them after such a raid, and by not having a place to go they could be hunted down and shot. Sergeants Burke and Pruett accepted Luton's thoughts on the matter and after some further discussion with the American officers Dekker and Szegda recognized the Americans were in command of any action against the enemy and the plan was put aside.

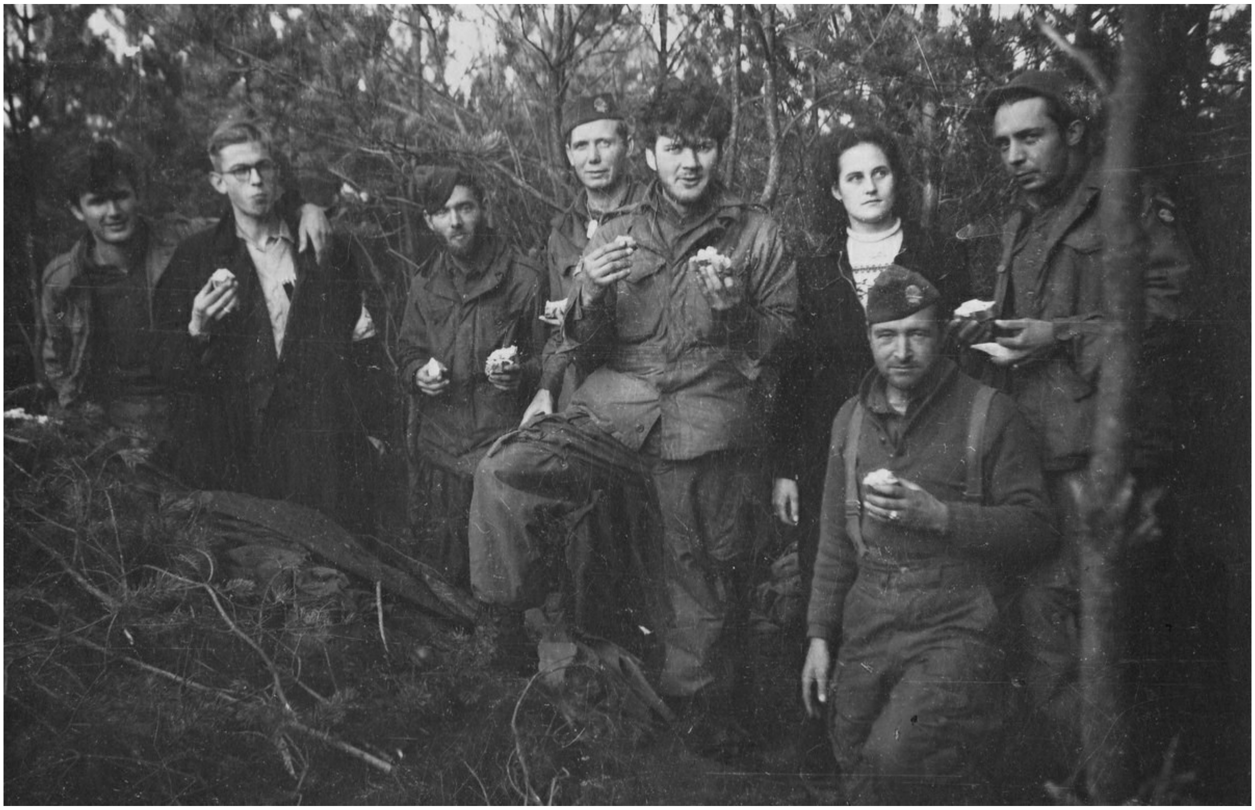
Glider pilot F/O James Cleary (Bergenshuizen) in conversation with Jan Kwant alias "Bing." (Dekker family)



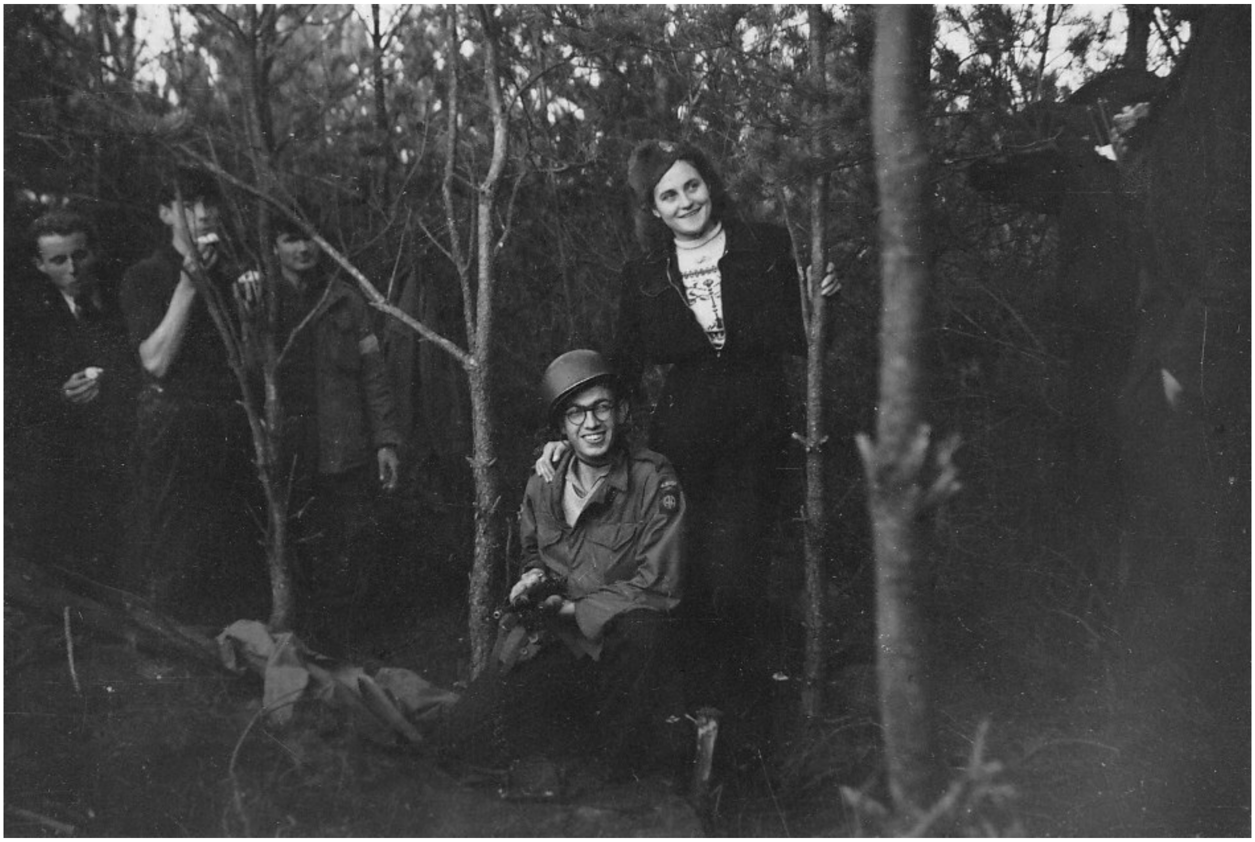
Four armed resistance men stand amongst an array of American and German equipment. Standing on the left is Gabriël Sauer with a British para helmet holding a German K98 rifle with fixed bayonet. Around his neck he wears a German paratrooper (Fallschirmjäger) ammunition bandoleer and around his waist a German ammunition belt with cartridge pouches. Gabriël Sauer also wears an American trench knife around his ankle, and on his arm a brassard with the American flag. To the right of him is Jan Kwant wearing an American helmet and an American field jacket. He is holding an American Thompson submachine gun. Sitting on the left is Klaas Dekker, wearing a camouflaged American helmet and holding an American M1 carbine between his legs. Dekker also has a brassard on his arm with the American flag, as is Marinus Verhagen, who crouches on his right, wearing German Army boots. He also wears an American helmet and is holding an M1 carbine aimed at the photographer. On his back he is wearing a German Army backpack. (Dekker family)



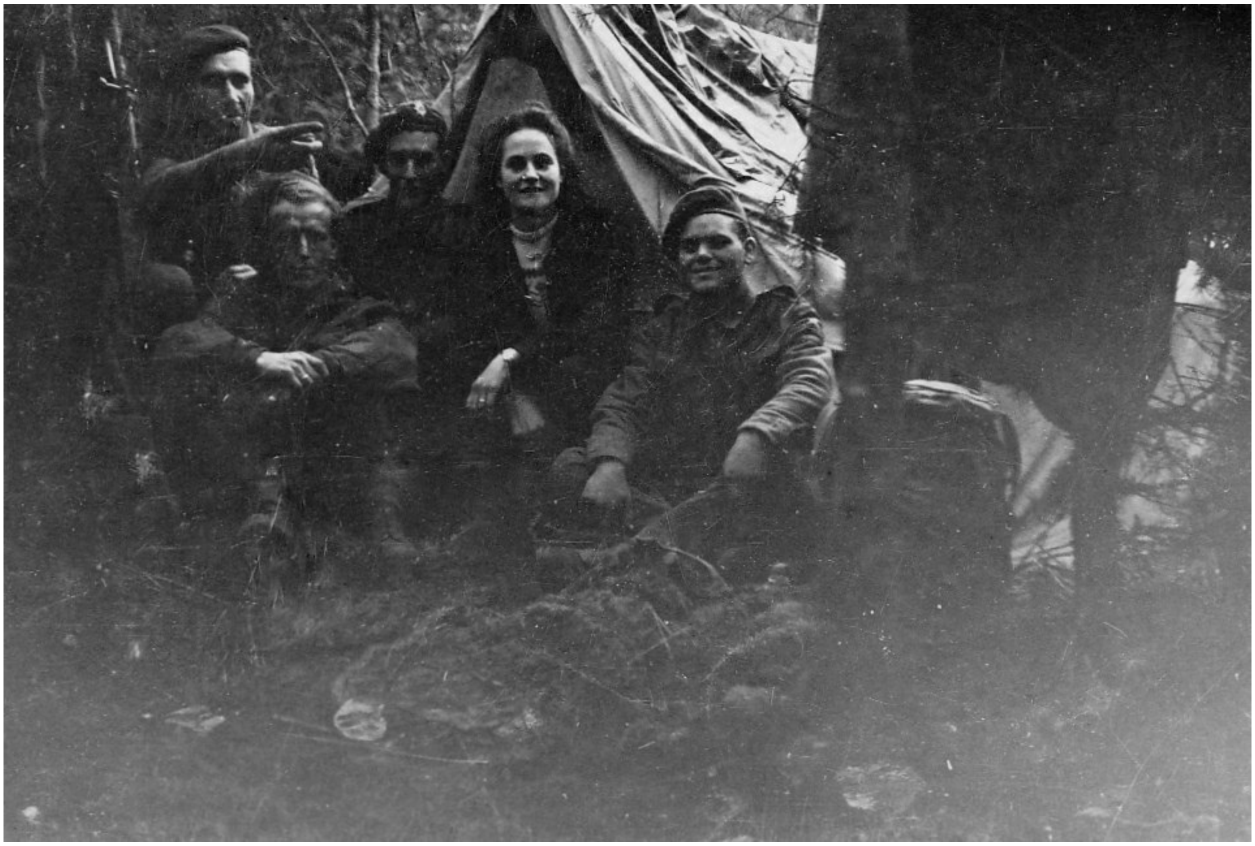
A photo with Roel Dekker, fourth from left, between some of the American troops, in the camp at Huisvennen. To his right are S/Sgt John Burke and four men of the 82nd Airborne Division. The third trooper to the right is S/Sgt John Alm. The second American to the left is F/O Chester Ritter. For the camera they show their sandwiches. (Dekker family)



This picture was taken in the same spot as the picture with Roel Dekker. Now Roel Dekker's fiancée, Zus van Zeeland, is also pictured between the airborne troops. Left of Roel Dekker stands Pfc Dewey Mitchell. Bottom right S/Sgt John Burke. (Dekker family)



On the left is Sjef de Jong with Gabriël Sauer and Pfc Dewey Mitchell. While the men enjoy their sandwiches in the camp at Huisvennen, Roel Dekker and his fiancée Zus van Zeeland are photographed. Roel is holding an American M1 carbine. (Dekker family)



Zus van Zeeland in front of a small tent in the camp at Huisvennen. On the left side pointing his finger is the Dutch commando Sgt Klaas Luitwieler while the British glider pilot Sgt James Whitehead (Biezenmortel) is sitting in front of him. To the left and right of Zus van Zeeland are both drivers of the Jeeps that were brought in by Sgt Whitehead. (Dekker family)

Chapter 10

THE AIRBORNE TROOPS FROM DRUNEN ARE TRANSFERRED TO THE KAMPINA

From the Pesterd to Huisvennen

During their reconnaissance mission on October 17 the two Staffords, Sgt Cutforth and Pte Tams, had managed to reach the Capuchin monastery in Biezenmortel, not far from the Loonse en Drunense duinen. Here the two men were looked after by Father Janus Optatus who put them in contact with another resistance organization. They told them that in the forests between Oisterwijk and Boxtel another large group of Allied airborne troops were being hidden by the local resistance workers. It was a group of about 50 men who were hiding in the forests of the Kampina. Sgt Cutforth decided that it would be worth trying to attempt to merge the two groups together in the Kampina hoping that if this was successful they might be able to cross enemy territory to their own lines the following night.

On October 20, the third night of their reconnaissance, Cutforth and Tams returned to the Pesterd where Cutforth reported to Lt Sharp giving him details of their trip and who they had met. He told Sharp about the other group of airborne troops in hiding in the Kampina and his plan to try and merge the two groups. He had devised a plan to position guides at several locations along the route who could then lead the group of British and Americans troops from the Pesterd over the long distance to the Kampina by the safest route. Lt Sharp approved this plan and arranged that contact be made with the other resistance organisation.

That evening everyone in the barn started to prepare for the long march of approximately 9 miles (15km). Leo Elshout, from Drunen, would accompany them and he had dressed himself in a British uniform, and even arranged a British name and service number in case something should go wrong and he fell into German hands. This, he felt, might at least give him a chance of not being executed on the spot by the Germans for helping the enemy. Besides, he wanted to accompany Sgt Leahy back to England, to join the British airborne forces.

In the meantime Chaplain Sleegers had told those in the Kampina about the other airborne troops in the Pesterd. Father Optatus had informed Sleegers about his meeting with the two Staffords in the monastery at Biezenmortel. The Chaplain explained that there was also a group of American and British airborne troops who had been hiding in an institution in Elshout, but because of the risk of discovery by the German were being temporarily accommodated in the Loonse en Drunense duinen. Chaplain Sleegers asked the resistance to accommodate this group in the Kampina as well. They agreed and the chaplain decided to pick up the group himself that evening. They agreed on passwords to be used and Sleegers told them he estimated that he would arrive with the troops from the Pesterd at around 1am, in the vicinity of the railway line behind the castle Nemerlaer.

The trip to the southeast

At 9.30pm, later than planned, the march from the Pesterd farmstead finally got under way. It was pitch black and thick low hanging clouds suggested it would rain. The Staffords would again take the lead with the two British glider pilots and the two artillery men behind them, followed by the Americans. The 47 airborne troops had only just started their journey when it started to pour with rain. It looked as if the rain was set in for the night and the pathways quickly turned into muddy pools. Despite this the journey continued, and at every turn or road crossing they stopped to allow everybody to catch up and ensure that no stragglers were lost.

Farmer Van Kempen, Henk Stooter, Ad Veltman, and David and Leo Elshout guided the group on the first leg of their journey to the hamlet of Giersbergen where all but Leo departed, leaving the group in his sole care. The others then returned, soaking wet, to the Pesterd while Leo Elshout led the troops through the forests of the Loonse en Drunense duinen to the next point, near the farm café, De Rustende Jager, at the edge of the dunes. From there Chaplain Sleegers and Tiny Metsemakers from Helvoirt would take the group on the final leg of their journey to the Kampina.

When both men had reached the agreed place earlier that evening it was pitch black. After waiting for a while, there were no signs of the airborne troops anywhere. When finally they heard some noise approaching from the distance the Chaplain quietly began to whisper the agreed password challenge, “Red” and strained his ears to hear the expected response “Beret,” but nothing happened. The Chaplain hid himself away at the edge of the dunes constantly whispering the challenge “Red, Red, Red” until suddenly the response “Beret” was heard. A hasty greeting followed and the march to the Kampina continued without further delay.

From the Loonse en Drunense duinen the group walked in a southeasterly direction towards the railway line running from Tilburg to ’s-Hertogenbosch. They first crossed the area between the villages of Biezenmortel and Udenhout, crossed the railway near the hamlet of ’t Winkel, south of Biezenmortel and, after a long march, finally reached the village of Haaren. While they were cautiously passing the outskirts of the village on the road from Haaren to Oisterwijk, a column of Germans appeared, so they were forced to quickly take cover behind the nearby houses. Here they watched the column of horses and carts followed by two tanks slowly rumble by. After the tanks were out of sight the march to the nearby castle Nemerlaer promptly resumed.

While the troops were making their way to the Kampina, Grard van der Meijden, Klaas Dekker, and Wim Meijer had assembled, at about 1am, near the railway line at the edge of the Kampina, behind castle Nemerlaer. After waiting for a long and uncomfortable couple of hours in the cold rain, Chaplain Sleegers, Leo Elshout, and the party of troops led by Lt Sharp finally appeared near the railway line; it was about 4am. Klaas Dekker and Wim Meijer were waiting for them having concealed themselves amongst the trees and undergrowth about 55 yards (50m) away from the track. As they crossed the railway Dekker whispered the challenge password “Air” which, to his great relief, was promptly followed by the correct response, “Borne.”

The group were now running much later than planned, the delays having been caused by avoiding the German column and people becoming detached from the group in the darkness. However, they had now safely arrived and after a short break they set out again, disappearing in the forest and tall grass of the Kampina on the final leg of their journey to Huisvennen.

They arrived here about an hour later and were warmly welcomed by one of the American leaders, S/ Sgt John Burke. He raised his men from their slumbers, instructing them to vacate their shelters so that the tired and wet troops from the Pesterd could enjoy some rest. While the weary troops set off seeking a dry and relatively comfortable place to rest, one of the men who had just arrived asked Chaplain Sleegers to take his confession. They moved away to one side of the camp to fulfil this task, but it would appear that a number of the other soldiers felt that they also had things they needed to confess and likewise approached the Chaplain.

The next morning the newcomers started drying their wet kit and digging deep pits that were well camouflaged with a covering of logs, branches, leaves, and clumps of moorland. The group had now grown to 94 in number, but one of the British was found to be missing when that morning the newcomers started making their own shelters. His name was Pte Stanley Glover and nobody appeared to know what had happened to him.

At about the same time that Glover was found to be missing, Ad Veltman was checking the barn in the Pesterd for any incriminating items that may have been left behind. This very necessary routine had been introduced to ensure that no evidence was left that could betray its use as a hiding place for a group of soldiers. While he was doing this Veltman was approached by Godfridus Visser who asked whether, by any chance, the cook Stanley Glover had gone missing the previous night. Obviously Veltman didn’t know anything about this but Visser told him that Glover had turned up in the hamlet of Fellenoord, where he was given temporary shelter on Van Wezel’s farm. Van Wezel had gone out seeking help from resistance members.

Ad Veltman didn’t waste time and rushed to the farm in Fellenoord where he found not only Stanley Glover, but also Frans Elshout and another underground worker, Theo van Delft. Stanley explained that in the darkness he had fallen into one of the foxholes that the Germans had dug alongside the road as a defensive measure. Because of the weight of his equipment, it had taken him some time before he had been able to climb out of the deep pit and by this time the rest of the group was nowhere to be seen or heard in the darkness. He had tried to find his own way to the Kampina, but failed. Then he had tried in vain to return to the starting point.

Veltman realized that, one way or another, he had to get Stanley Glover to the Kampina. Frans Elshout and Theo van Delft agreed to undertake this task and after having provided Stanley with some peasant’s clothing and a bicycle, the three departed. Late in the afternoon of October 21, Stanley Glover finally arrived back with his platoon, bringing the group at Kampina to 95 troops.

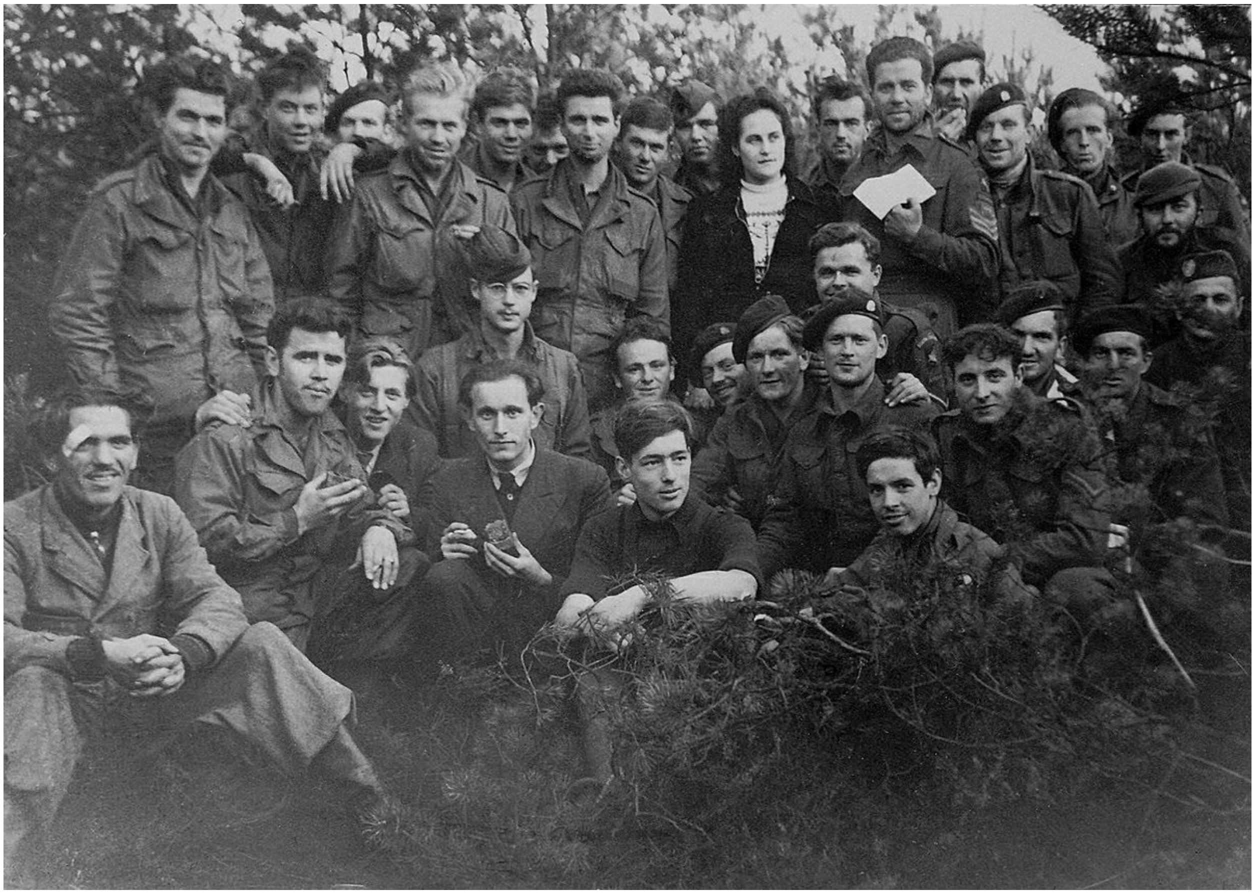
A discussion soon developed between the British, Americans, and the resistance members about the possibility of breaking through the current static German front, and trying to reach their own lines. It was decided that the resistance would first undertake some reconnaissance covering a section of the route from the Kampina to the frontline and the surrounding area to assess the situation.

A number of resistance members from Oisterwijk went out to reconnoitre the sector between Oisterwijk and Moergestel and Klaas Dekker went in the direction of Best–Liempde. In the Best–Liempde area there was a heavy German presence, and taking into account the many minefields that had been laid in the area, a breakout through this sector was clearly impossible. The reconnaissance in the Oisterwijk–Moergestel sector returned with similar information.

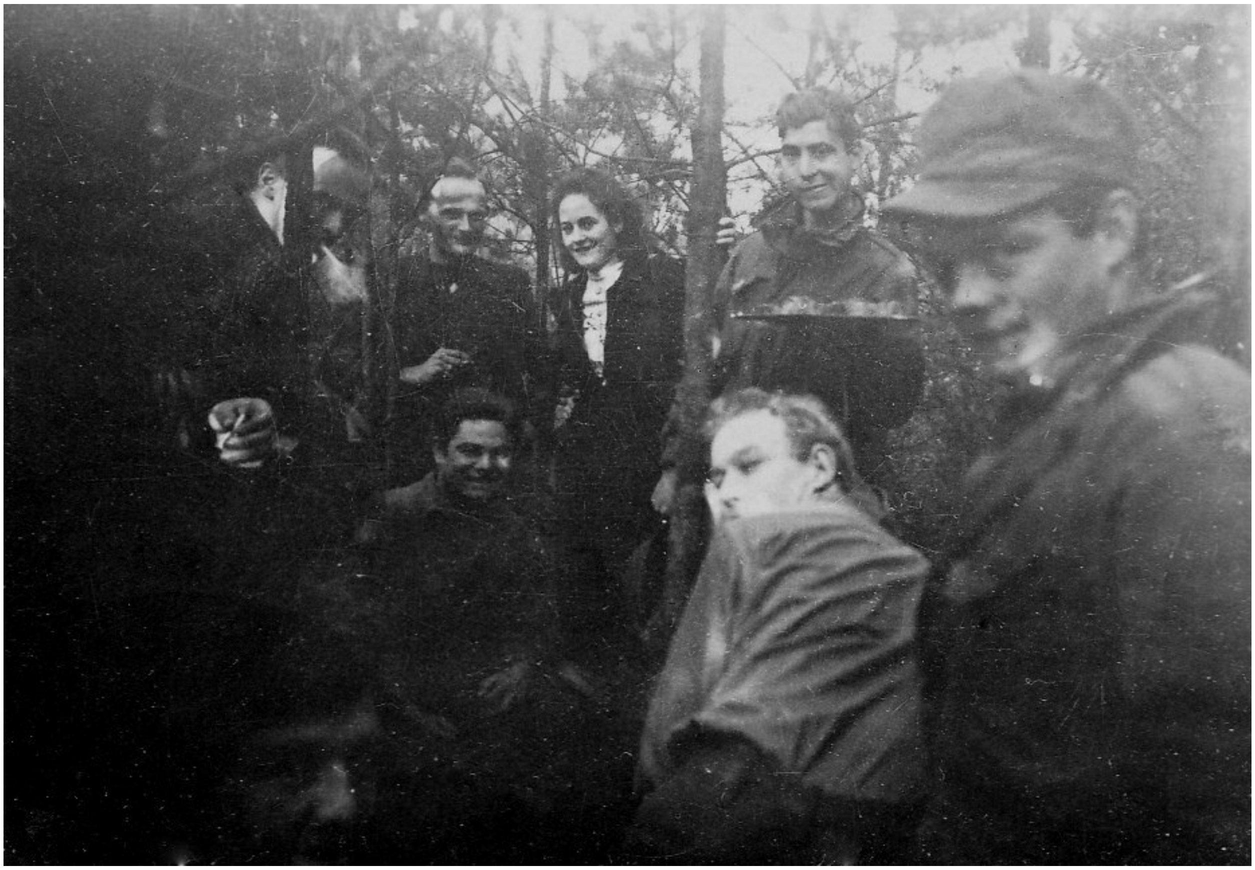
Meanwhile Jan Mallens of the André resistance organization had also joined the group. Jan served as a courier for his group and on his own initiative had been working on a farm just behind the German front line for the past three weeks. On a couple of occasions he had tried to cross the frontline to reach the liberated area around Eindhoven, and so had come to know the area pretty well. On October 20 St Sharp had received documents from the Deputy Commander of the group André, to be taken to the headquarters of the resistance movement in Eindhoven. The group André was asking the Allies to send an aircraft to collect this and other information which their group had obtained concerning classified military information relating to documents, highlighted maps, German troop strength, and dropping sites. Sharp handed over these documents to Jan Mallens, who was already carrying several other documents destined for the resistance headquarters in Eindhoven. Jan Mallens offered to guide the entire group through the German lines provided that they were prepared to fight their way through at a number of places along the route. However, the Americans were against this proposal as they had other plans and wanted to wait for a possible Allied breakout.

Lt Sharp on the other hand couldn’t wait to move on and didn’t want to sit idly by, hiding and waiting, any longer. Since landing with his platoon at De Moer he had been considering various options for a move to rejoin his own forces and was continually planning for this. First he had planned to take his platoon to Arnhem, but now that he was in the Kampina he wanted to travel with the Americans to the east, as soon as possible, to make contact with their troops. From what he was now hearing it appeared that now the Americans were not going to move and wanted to stay put and wait for the war to catch up with them. This American decision made Lt Sharp consider returning, with his platoon, to the safety of the Pesterd barn in the west. He decided to postpone making any definite decision for 24 hours.

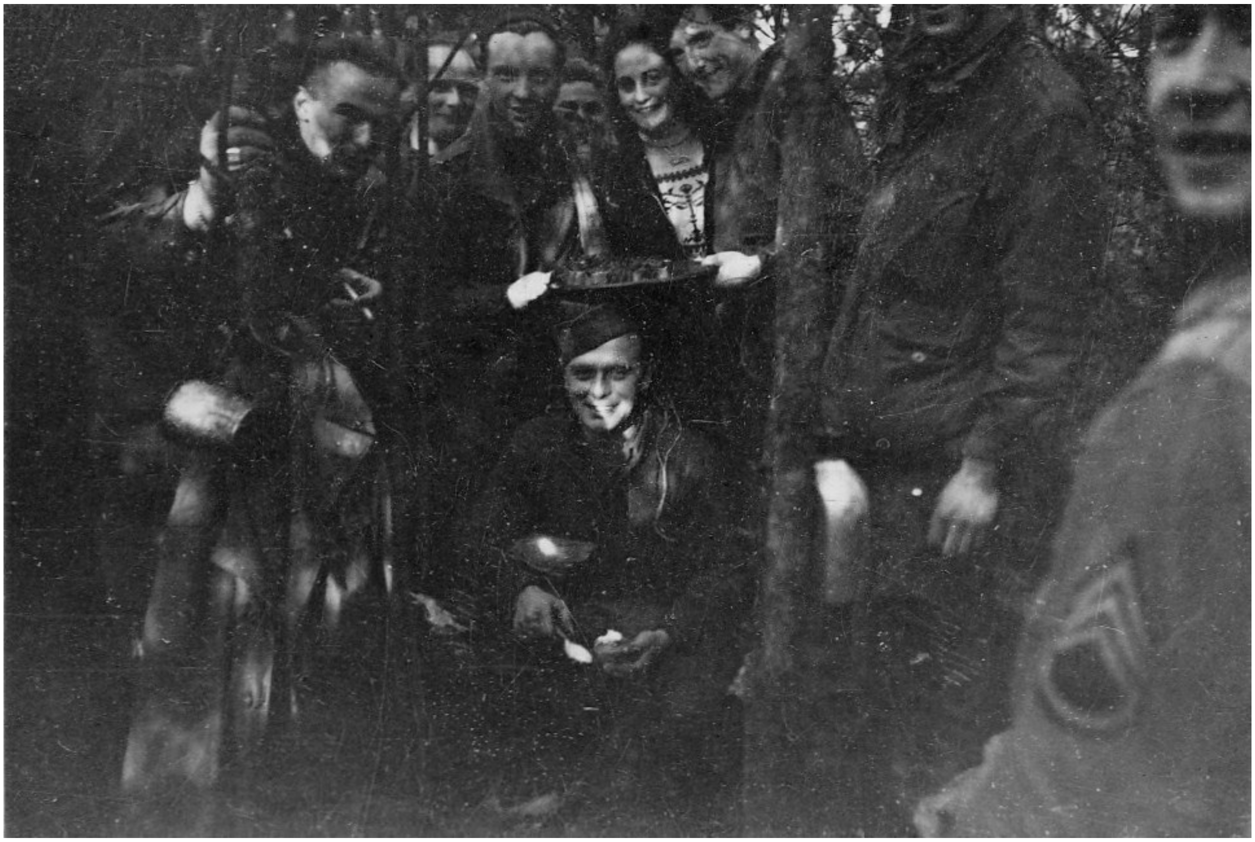
That afternoon Leo Elshout had a talk with the two British glider pilots Barcley and Millar. They asked him why he wanted to join the British airborne forces and Leo explained that he wanted to become a paratrooper and that he expected that within a few weeks, a month at the most, he would return and drop over Holland to fight the Germans and help liberate his country. They told him to have sense and to go back home. He would be of more value to his country and Drunen when the place was liberated. They liked Leo very much because he been so friendly to them and, as they didn’t want anything to happen to him, they tried to make Leo see the light and return home, saying they didn’t know how much longer they would be in hiding. Leo was not used to the hard living of a soldier and he would be far better off in his warm bed at home. They told him he would be at least six months in the army before he would see a parachute. Leo began to understand and said he would talk it over with Sgt Leahy and some of the Staffords. Their advice was taken anyway and, discouraged from joining the airborne forces, Leo returned back to Drunen. Safe in Drunen, Leo told the others of Sharp’s proposal to return to the Pesterd and to attempt to link up with own forces in the south from there. Together with the other members of the group it was decided to make plans to move Sharp and his platoon back to the Loonse en Drunense duinen on October 23. However, due to the ever changing situation this plan was to change yet again.



A group photo with American (left) and British (right) airborne troops, taken in the camp at Huisvennen. Between them are a number of their helpers. To the left sits Grard van der Meijden with a plaster above his right eye. The plaster served as his talisman, without which he wouldn’t have left his house. Beside Grard van der Meijden sits Pfc Michael Bokesch. The third man in the first row is Marinus Verhagen; beside him Jan Mallens of the resistance group André. The man with the rolled up sleeves is Gabriël Sauer, directly behind him sits Pte Leland Wright. Zus van Zeeland is standing next to the British soldier holding a paper; he is Royal Artillery Sgt Leahy. Just visible to the right behind him is the Dutch commando Sgt Klaas Luitwieler eating what appears to be an apple. To the far right, with knitted cap and beard, is the American F/O Chester Ritter and behind him the British glider pilot Sgt James Whitehead. (Dekker family)



A group photo in the camp at Huisvennen with amongst others Jan Kwant (top left), a Pole who was staying in the camp by the name of Leon Nagórski, and Zus van Zeeland. In front of the Pole is Pte Pete Tamborini. (Dekker family)



Jan Kwant, the Pole Leon Nagórski and Zus van Zeeland. Squatting is Pte Joseph Nyeste and far right S/Sgt Harold Farr. (Dekker family)

Chapter 11

NINETY-EIGHT TROOPS

Three USAAF servicemen

On October 22, the day following the arrival of the airborne troops from the Pesterd, three more military servicemen were brought to join those in the Kampina. They were three American crew members of a troop carrier that had crashed on the outskirts of the village Oostelbeers, about 9 miles (15km) west of Eindhoven, on September 17. These were the co-pilot of the aircraft, 2/Lt William F. Baker, the wireless operator S/Sgt Rollin D. Ellis, and the crew chief T/Sgt Cristopher S. Domitrovich.

They were from 434 Troop Carrier Group, 72 Troop Carrier Squadron and had been flying a C-47 Skytrain, tail number 43-16033, which had taken off that morning from USAAF Station Aldermaston in the south of England at 10.30am destined for the drop zones near Veghel. They were to drop 16 paratroopers of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st American Airborne Division on drop-zone A at the village of Eerde. The aircraft was piloted by the American pilot, 1/Lt Donald A. Pahlow and he carried two further passengers, an intelligence officer of the 72 Troop Carrier Squadron by the name of Capt William Wade and war correspondent Cpl Tom A. Hoge of the *Stars and Stripes* magazine. The latter was there to experience the operational flight to Holland, reporting it in a story and taking pictures.

Transport and glider pilots of 434 Troop Carrier Group, 72 Troop Carrier Squadron on September 18, 1944. They are standing in front of their C-47 Skytrain transport aircraft and CG-4A Waco gliders while BrigGen Anthony C. McAuliffe of the 101st Airborne Division is addressing them. (NARA via G. Segers)

The flight to the drop-zone proceeded without major incident and the paratroops had been successfully dropped, on target, over Eerde. Lt Pahlow had made a 180 degree turn and was setting his course home. At about 1pm he was flying again over Boxtel, where his aircraft had been fired at earlier, on their way to the drop-zone. Suddenly all hell broke loose and they saw the aircraft of 1/Lt C. Nixdorf burst into flames. The next thing they saw were two men leaving the aircraft and tumble helpless to the ground, without their parachutes opening, landing in the middle of the village. Seconds later they watched the burning aircraft crash into the ground near Kleinder Liempde, south of Boxtel. At that moment they felt the jolt of a direct hit on their own aircraft. T/ Sgt Cristopher Domitrovich yelled out that their aircraft was on fire, but it took the jolt of a second burst before they heard Lt Pahlov calling over the intercom that the aircraft was on fire and that everybody had to get ready to bail out.

They quickly responded getting out of their seats, removing their Flak suits and snapping on their parachutes. 2/Lt Baker decided to waste no time and, not bothering to collect any further equipment, left the aircraft through the side door dressed only in a khaki shirt, olive drab trousers, GI shoes, and having his dog tags. In his hurry, however, Baker forgot to take his escape kit along, leaving it behind in his leather pilot's jacket in the aircraft. Lt Pahlov quickly managed to distribute some of Baker's kit but the remainder of the crew had to jump without it.

While S/ Sgt Ellis, Cpl Hoge, and T/ Sgt Domitrovich jumped safely from the burning aircraft, Lt Pahlov was still fiddling with Capt Wade's parachute. He shouted that everybody should jump and they all took it for granted that he too was ready to leave. Capt Wade managed to leave the aircraft, but was killed when his parachute failed to deploy, he struck the ground before the canopy had billowed. Lt Pahlov was unable to leave the stricken aircraft and was killed when it crashed in flames in a field alongside the road, De Maneschijn, on the edge of the village of Oostelbeers.

As Lt Baker jumped from the aircraft, he could see the guns shooting at the aircraft overhead far below him. To minimise the risk of being hit, he delayed opening his parachute until he was at about 300 feet (90m), although he had jumped from the aircraft at 1,200 feet (360m). When his parachute opened he had only a few seconds to pull on the lines to steer himself away from some high tension wires and then he was safely on the ground.

Baker had landed just north of Oirschot and following the advice given at briefings in England before his departure, he immediately went to ground near where he had landed, hiding in the bushes for 30 hours without moving despite the rain and lack of food and water.

On Monday night, September 18, he carefully began to walk around the area to orientate himself and get the lay of the land. Remembering the map he had studied during the briefings, and by using the North Star as a guide, he first moved eastwards towards the railway line running between Boxtel and Best, intending to cross. However, once he arrived there he found German sentries along the eastern side making a crossing impossible at that place. Instead he went southwest towards Oirschot and the Wilhelmina Canal. Here too he could not cross as there was not a single bridge to be found that had not been blown up.

As he passed along the canal, desperately searching for a crossing point, he found himself passing a heated battle which he stealthily avoided becoming a casualty of. Now becoming convinced that he would not find a bridge over the canal, he took to the north where, avoiding the large numbers of German troops moving in force towards Eindhoven he managed cross the main road from Eindhoven to Tilburg. That night he found shelter hiding in a haystack, where he considered his situation and realized that, come dawn, he had to do something.

Physically and mentally exhausted from his evasion he finally fell asleep, only to be rudely awakened the next morning by the sound of a fierce machine gun battle in an adjoining field where fighting had broken out. He quickly left his haystack and departed eastward. After a while he came to a pasture where he saw an old woman and a boy milking some cows. He approached the couple and told them that he was American and cold and hungry. It was obvious that the old woman understood what Baker meant, because she immediately offered him some of their warm milk, while the boy handed him a coat, which he gratefully accepted.

Despite of the fact that the three had been standing in full sight of German troops marching past on their way to Best, they took Lt Baker back to their farm where he was able to warm himself by a stove and where they gave him some more food to eat. In the meantime they had sent for a priest from a nearby monastery who could understand a little English. Fortunately the priest was able to speak sufficient English to hold a conversation of sorts with the American. The priest’s name was Meyer and he came from Straten a small village east of Oirschot. He expressed his willingness to help Baker and promised to vacate his room in the monastery for him to hide in for the time being. When he later returned he escorted Baker, now dressed as a religious brother and wearing wooden clogs, to the monastery where he would stay for the next four days.

Here he patiently waited and bided his time. One day he was sitting in front of the window on the second floor watching the Germans troops shooting at the Allied aircraft that were passing overhead. On the fourth day he received the welcome news that there were two other Americans hiding in the area and he was asked if he wanted to join them. Baker readily agreed and soon learned that the other two were none other than Ellis and Domitrovich.

He was provided with civilian clothes and taken to a farm about two hours away. The farm was owned by Johan Hubacher, a member of the local underground movement.

September 23

Late in the evening of September 23 Johan Hubacher took Baker to join the two other Americans who were hidden in a thatched hut in the woods near Tregelaar, in the vicinity of Oirschot. When Baker arrived he was pleased to see Ellis and Domitrovich were safe and listened intently as they told him how they had survived the first few days after having landed near Oirschot on September 17.

Separated from one another on landing, the two had stayed in their individual hiding places until the next morning when they had both been approached by people from the local underground movement and taken to the Vlemminx family's farm, at the Polsdonken, north of Oirschot. S/Sgt Ellis arrived at the farm at around 9am, finding that T/ Sgt Domitrovich had been taken there earlier that morning. After the two men had been reunited and fed, they were taken to a well camouflaged old pigsty where they were hidden.

Late in the evening of September 19 about 30 German soldiers unexpectedly turned up at the farm and settled themselves in for the night less than 110 yards (100m) from the American's hiding place. The following morning, September 20, a fourth crew member, the war correspondent Cpl Hoge, was being brought to the farm by a member of the local underground who had found him and given him overnight shelter. Unaware of the presence of the German soldiers on the farm they walked straight into their hands and Hoge was immediately taken prisoner.

In their hiding place Ellis and Domitrovich had been totally unaware of Hoge's intended arrival and subsequent arrest and were only told of it sometime later by one of the locals, who had spoken with Hoge shortly after he had been taken prisoner. Following this near disaster they had been swiftly moved to the thatched hut in the woods near Tregelaar where Baker had now joined them.

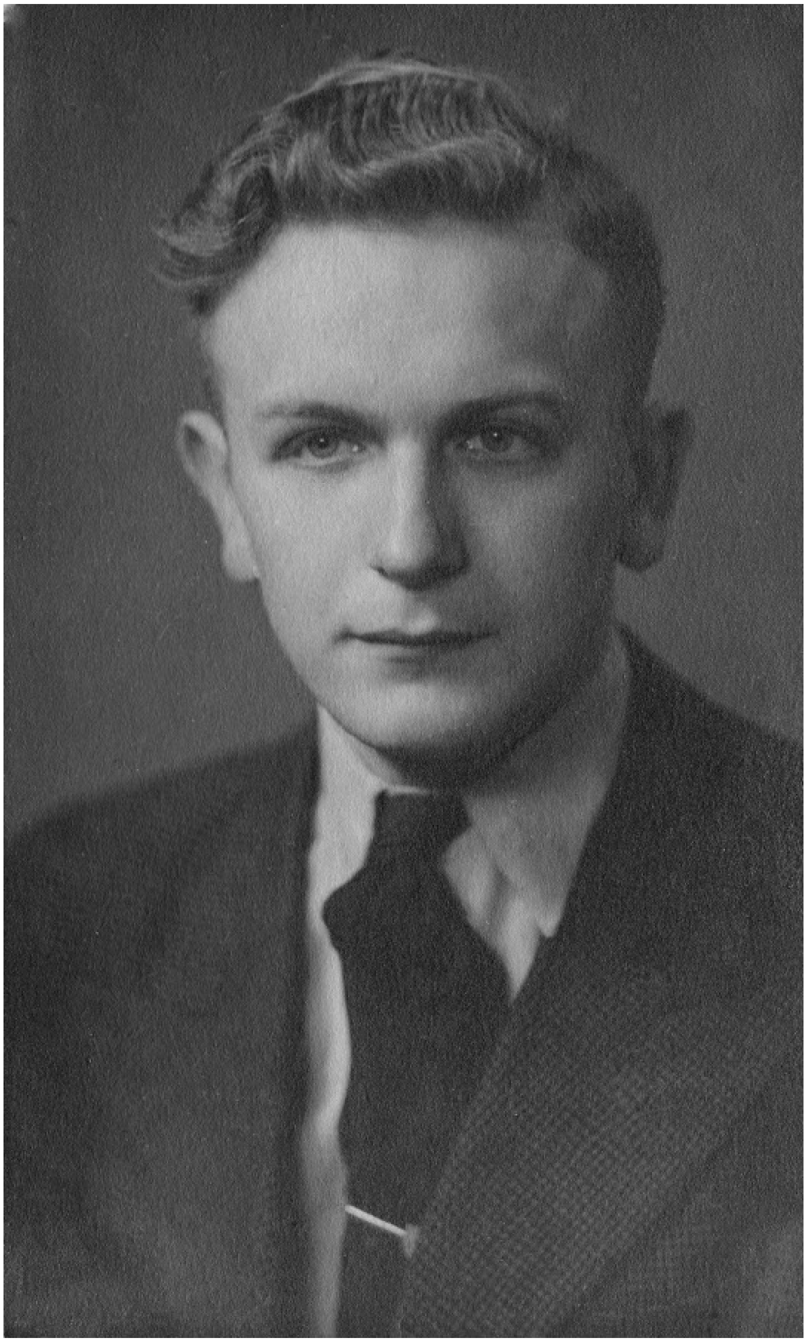
A few days later the three men had to be quickly moved once again as the Germans started clearing the woods in the area of their hideout. They were picked up by Johan Hubacher, Louis Termeer, and a farmer from the surrounding area and taken to another hiding place at Broekstraat in

Spoordonk a couple of miles to the west. This shelter was not far from a small bridge across the Beerze, named the Viermennekes Bridge. Despite the risks caused by the regular presence of German troops, who were often billeting themselves on their farms, the local farmers regularly brought them supplies of food, mostly black bread and potatoes, while Louis Termeer, son of the Acting Mayor of Oirschot, kept them updated about developments in the area.

Eager to return to his own lines, Lt Baker was constantly trying to find ways that he might succeed. A possibility arose when he was speaking to a man of the Moergestel underground who suggested that, rather than trying to the east, he stood an almost 90 percent chance of making it and reaching the Allied forces to the south if he was to swim the canal. However, on discussing this option with the others he learned that Domitrovich could not swim and was terrified of the water. Baker did not insist and abandoned the plan. They would just have to sit and wait it out.

The beginning of October

In the beginning of October the civilian population was ordered to leave the area so that the Germans could make use of the farm houses themselves. The three Americans were told that they had to move to another shelter immediately and Louis Termeer, the man who had previously helped Ellis and Domitrovich, came again to assist them. Dressed in civilian clothes and with their few belongings on their backs, the men walked for a few hours in westerly direction towards their new hiding place; a farm located near Moergestel. A young man from the Moergestel resistance would deliver food to them which would have to be brought from another farm a few miles distant.



22-year-old Louis Termeer from Oirschot, son of the Acting Mayor of Oirschot. (H.J.C. Termeer)

A few days after they had arrived at the farm, the Germans also entered this area. They placed dynamite under a bridge across the nearby canal, making it ready for demolition, and posted a sentry to guard it. Since the resistance people would have had to pass this sentry every time they brought food, they decided the risk was too great, and so they brought sufficient to last for three days and had to leave the three Americans men to their own devices. Baker, Ellis, and Domitrovich were fully aware that Germans were residing in a nearby farm as they could hear their rifle fire at intervals. One thing that worried them was the growing number of people that appeared to know of their whereabouts but, luckily, they had not yet been discovered. The situation, however, was potentially dangerous and the men started considering the possibility of escape.

Once the underground was able to reach the men again, they discussed the matter with them. They arranged to have the surrounding areas reconnoitred to ascertain how many Germans were present in each area. They guessed that swimming the canal was probably the only feasible way out. However, Baker was not prepared to leave Domitovich behind and, despite Louis Termeer's offer to accompany Domitovich and help him across the canal, they decided not to proceed.

Despite the ever increasing risk that the area would also be cleared and that they would have no other place to go, the three decided to remain where they were. The initial three days without a visit lengthened to four and five. There was no sign of Termeer or any of the other three underground people that used to visit and the men started to think that they had been abandoned by their helpers.

One night a farmer arrived to tell them that the underground worker, who had gone to reconnoitre the area, had not returned from Tilburg and had probably been caught. So, once again, the helpers were obliged to leave the Americans on their own for the time being. To make matters worse the farmer was also of the opinion that the Germans would probably clear the area in due course.

October 12–22

On October 12 the underground came with the message that the three Americans had to be moved for their own safety and were taken to the hamlet De Logt, where they were accommodated in a small tent. This tent had been erected by a farmer near his own farm and from where they had a good view of his farm. However, on either side of the tent there were pathways so they had to be extremely quiet and whisper at all times.

During the following days the three camouflaged their tent as best they could and sat or lay in cramped positions waiting for further developments.

To add to their discomfort during this period it rained almost continually and the tent leaked in quite a few places. The men remained in this tent for at least four days, after which they moved to a neighboring farm where they stayed for a few more days. Shortly before October 21 the message came, via the resistance, that the Germans had ordered the area to be evacuated before the afternoon of that date. The farmer knew somebody in the vicinity of the village of Moergestel who was willing to take the three men in. Having no one else to turn to they followed the farmer to his contact the following day.

Apart from their GI issue shoes the three Americans were still dressed in civilian clothing, which they had received from their helpers. With their blankets rolled under their arms, they left for Moergestel. The farmer walked ahead on his own, with the three Americans following him at a safe distance, just keeping him in sight. The route which the farmer took would take them, after a long detour, along the main road from Tilburg to Eindhoven. This seemed inevitable and the Americans knew that they were taking a great risk by walking along this main road, for they had no identification papers and would have to be on this road for at least an hour. All the same, it was the quickest route through occupied territory to reach Moergestel.

Having reached this main road, they followed it westwards, towards Tilburg. There were many German troops on this road and they all appeared to look at the men’s GI shoes, which were clearly visible under their clothing. However, luck was on their side and they were not stopped. The road was very busy and, in spite of the risks of Allied air attacks, there was a lot of German military traffic passing along it with numerous groups of German soldiers travelling to and from the frontline on bicycles, cars, trucks, and motorcycles. Just before dark the group finally made contact with a man from the resistance who guided them to a farm on the northern edge of Moergestel, where they were to stay that night. Here they were told that the Germans had dug themselves in along the canal and that they had also mined it. It became clear to the three Americans that it was now impossible to break out to the south.

On the farm they met a Jew in hiding, called Hans, who had been working at the civil service in Eindhoven. Hans was in possession of a small radio on which the men were able to listen to the news from the frontline. That evening they learned that still more Americans were in hiding in the surrounding woods. These were the American airborne troops in the Kampina and the three were told by their helpers that they wanted to move them to join them the following morning. They were then provided with a complete change of clothes and served a good meal, after which they listened to the radio before retiring to the barn where they slept on the hay.

The following morning, October 22, the men rose very early and, after having refreshed themselves and eaten something, they prepared for the next march. A boy named Jan Klijberg came to tell them where the Americans were hiding and that he would be their guide. Accompanied by a girl he would walk in front to distract any Germans that they might bump in to.

It was still dark when they set off for the Kampina. They first walked from Moergestel to Oisterwijk and then turned in the direction of Boxtel and the Kampina. They walked straight through occupied territory, swarming with German troops, but everything went well and they arrived safely at the prearranged rendezvous at the edge of the Kampina where they met up with Grard van der Meijden, who led them on the final part of their journey into the Kampina and to the airborne troops in their camp at Huisvennen. Together with these new Americans the group now consisted of 98 British and American airborne troops.

Chapter 12

DESERTERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR

Food supply from unexpected quarters

The airborne troops were not aware that some of the food they were receiving was being delivered by a 13-year-old boy from Boxtel. This boy had been evacuated, together with his family, the De Beer's, from the village of Oirschot, not far to the south of Boxtel. Most of the family were staying with the sisters Jo and Cor van Hooff, who ran a small shop in Boxtel while their 13-year-old son stayed with the neighbors, the Van Kuyk's. The Van Hooff sisters were also hiding a Jew called Louis Katan in their home. It was Louis Katan, alias "Fransen" who, on September 23, had helped glider pilot Arthur Moss and his passengers at Kinderbos. It was not long after their arrival in Boxtel that De Beer's learned that Louis Katan had helped 11 airborne troops to hide in the Kampina.

A few days after the De Beer family had arrived in Boxtel, the boy was instructed to carry something over to a farm near the Kampina. It was hoped that, because of his age, the Germans wouldn't pay much attention to him and he was told to tell nobody about his trip. What had started off initially with small packages that could easily be carried by hand, had within a few weeks moved on to much larger loads transported in a push cart. All these items had to be delivered to a farm, just outside Boxtel close to the edge of the Kampina. The boy also delivered bread baked by Wout van de Laar, the baker from the Rechterstraat in Boxtel, who had been providing the troops with bread ever since their arrival. Jam and pastry was also provided by a grocery store in Boxtel, again delivered to the farm on a regular basis by the boy. If stopped by the Germans he had been instructed to tell them that the food that he was transporting was destined for evacuated civilians. Once safely at the farm the food was transferred into milk churns and carried further to the Kampina on bicycle by resistance workers dressed as farmers. It was in this way, via Wim Meijer's home, that the food finally reached the airborne troop’s camp.

Between October 20 and 23, the last three days leading up to the liberation, quite a few German troops were stationed in Boxtel who were requisitioning almost every horse, cart, or bicycle. Because of this the ever increasing food supply required from Boxtel became virtually impossible. The extensive British shelling of the area, which had been going on since September, also caused great difficulty. The organization of the food supply was therefore transferred to the villages of Haaren and Oisterwijk where the Oisterwijk baker, Van Beckhoven, provided 60 loaves of bread and the firm of Van Iersel 20lb of butter on a daily basis.

About a week prior to liberation, Cees van Leeuwen passed on some important information to Roel Dekker telling him about a German food transport that was to take place very soon. This transport was destined for the German troops on the front lines beyond the village of Liempde and would leave from Huize Leeuwenrode, which the Germans had requisitioned from Cees van Leeuwen. While the German guards were distracted with some stiff drinks supplied by a servant girl from the Van Leeuwen family, Roel Dekker and Marinus Verhagen, both dressed in German uniforms, climbed aboard and rode away on the horse and cart loaded with the German food supplies and made for the Kampina.

Four German deserters

Around October 18 the German Obergefreiter Tony Gebel had confided in Cees van Leeuwen, saying that he was planning to desert the German Army with three of his companions. Tony had been informed that he would have to appear before a further Court Martial in due course to establish the extent to which he had been involved in the attack on Hitler’s life in July of that year. Because of the extensive help that Tony had already provided to Cees and his friends he felt that it was time that the favour was repaid. He wanted to desert and his company, now deployed along the frontline, would have to find their own way to obtain the necessary food supplies.

Cees van Leeuwen discussed the subject with both the Boxtel resistance movement and the airborne troops and asked if he could take the four deserters to their camp. Most of them agreed, although some, including a few Dutch, were initially opposed to the idea. However, Cees van Leeuwen was able to persuade those that had any reservations and, finally, had everyone’s agreement. The Americans, however, made it quite clear that Cees van

Leeuwen was going to be held fully responsible for their behaviour.

There was no time to waste as there were a lot of detailed arrangements yet to be made. On the afternoon of Thursday October 19, Cees van Leeuwen went to Sint-Michielsgestel where Tony Gebel was already waiting for him so as to avoid any questions from the guard on duty. The field kitchen had been installed in several small rooms of the former convent and in one of those rooms the five men gathered around a table while the radio was tuned to the BBC. The window in the room provided an excellent view on the courtyard, so they could quickly change the subject in case somebody should approach.

To Cees' amazement, Tony told him that their desertion would have to take place during the night of Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 October. This stemmed from information that he had received from a trustworthy source within the German Intelligence service that the Allies were starting an offensive on that Sunday that would last for eight days. According to Tony they should be certain to have passed the Bosscheweg before midnight, because after that time this main road would be targeted and subject to heavy artillery fire. Their plan was to be based around that information.

The two Jeeps, however, were now in danger of jeopardising their plan. Because of the falling leaves, those Jeeps were standing, clearly visible, at Sparrenrijk and had to be moved as soon as possible because, if found by the Germans, nobody using the area could pretend not to have noticed them. Too many people were being put at undue risk, so the Jeeps had to be moved.

It was decided to drag them to another place in Sparrenrijk utilising Tony, his German Army friends, and their horse during the night of Friday 20 and Saturday 21 October. At their new location the Jeeps would be hidden amongst a patch of small, low growing fir trees. Tony and his fellow soldiers planned to arrive at Van de Ven's farm at about 11pm and, after finishing their task, they would return to their barracks in Sint-Michielsgestel early the following morning. The next evening they intended to desert, leaving the German Army for good, and travel once again to Van de Ven's farm where they would meet their Dutch guides who would lead them to the camp of the airborne troops in the Kampina.

As agreed on the Friday evening Cees van Leeuwen heard the distant sound of a trotting horse. A few moments later it went quiet as the horse had turned onto the sandy road leading to the farm; shortly afterwards Tony and his friends turned into the farm with their horse and cart. The horse was silently unharnessed and led into a barn. Tony told Cees that they would have to wait for a while before starting out as he had been informed that the guard at his old house, just a few hundred metres away, and where GenLt Poppe was residing, made regular rounds until 12.30am.

The evening was pitch black and the weather bad, the rain having turned the sandy roads into muddy pools. At 1am they got to their feet, collected the chains and harness, took the horse outside and once it was harnessed set out on their way. After a lot of hard work they succeeded in liberating the Jeeps from the mass of branches with which they had been covered, and pulled the two vehicles from the coppice. The two Jeeps were then tied together with a rope and the horse connected to the front vehicle. With a terrific rattling of chains the horse started to pull but only succeeded in immediately breaking the rope connecting the two Jeeps. To compound their problems it soon became apparent that, because of the mud, the horse needed all of its strength to pull just one of the Jeeps, pulling two together was out of the question.

The enormity of their task was quickly becoming apparent. Every 10 to 15 yards (9–14m) the horse would come to a halt and it was only with the greatest of effort that it could be encouraged to get going again. The five men struggled to move the first Jeep forward through the mud, while they had to leave the other one behind in the middle of the sandy road. They had totally underestimated the enormity of their task and, specifically, the weight of the Jeeps which was clearly too great for their horse.

When they were barely halfway they had to get the Jeep across a shallow ditch and the men gathered a lot of branches to fill the ditch. At their first attempt to cross the ditch the Jeep slid off this temporary bridge and fell on its side into the ditch. Their horse became more and more troublesome, stubbornly refusing to undertake its task. More branches were added and it was only after much jerking and pulling, that they finally succeeded in getting the Jeep out of the ditch.

Continuing on at last they seemed to be making some progress but, moments later, the horse stopped again and refused to move. The men tried everything to persuade the horse to move, cursing and swearing and very much aware of the need to get a move on. At long last they got the horse moving again and they finally arrived at the new hiding place. It was now nearly 5am; they had been busy for almost four hours! Clearly the plan could not be completed. They still had to try and push the Jeep far enough into the forest to conceal it and then go back to collect the other Jeep. By the time that they had returned to it the horizon started to glow light. Dawn was coming and it would be impossible to move this second Jeep to the new hiding place in time, so it was decided to leave it behind, concealed between the high fir trees along the sandy road. This task proved to be much easier, but the sun was already up when they returned to the farm.

Being fully aware the Jeeps could easily be found; the men were desperate and felt hopelessly lost. As soon as the Jeeps were found, it would be a simple task to follow the tyre tracks and find where they had come from. And that was dangerously close to the Van de Ven farm. On top of this, when they returned to the farm they discovered that the big four wheeled cart that Tony and his friends had arrived with was loaded with all kinds of things which they hadn’t taken much notice of when they had left their barracks in the dark. This had to be unloaded, but the question was where to leave it? And what would happen if the Germans came to the farm and found it? Sharply, Tony said that they should throw everything off the cart and return with it to their barracks as soon as possible. They decided to store everything, for the time being, in the farm’s air raid shelter and started unloading the cart. All sorts of things came from the cart, such as half a pig and half a cow, hundreds of tins of meat, numerous loaves, thousands of cigars, a typewriter, a radio, and even a dozen German uniforms and helmets, a few rifles, ammunition, and hand grenades.

After Tony and his friend had left the farm, boxes were fetched and all the non-perishable goods were placed in them. These boxes were then carried into the woods, hidden in pits and covered with a thin layer of fir needles. By 11am in the morning there was no trace of any of the German supplies remaining. Everybody then waited anxiously to see what the coming day would bring.

Everything went smoothly as the Jeeps had not been discovered yet. That evening at 11pm Tony and his friends returned once more with their horse and cart which was, once again, loaded with all kinds of goods. Marinus Verhagen and Roel Dekker, who were going to guide the four Germans to the Kampina, were also present at the farm. Everybody gathered around the weak light of a petrol lamp for a drink and a final review of their plans. Not long after they went out to search in the dark for the place where they had buried the boxes that morning. Everything had to be taken with them to the Americans, together with the items which were already loaded onto the cart. The arrival of Tony and his friends with these goods should put an end to the food shortage of the airborne troops. The boxes were carried from the woods and they then recovered some more items that had been hidden about the farm until, finally, everything was brought together. The cart was then loaded high with supplies and they said a fond farewell while Marinus Verhagen and Roel Dekker, both dressed in German uniforms, took their places at the front of the cart.

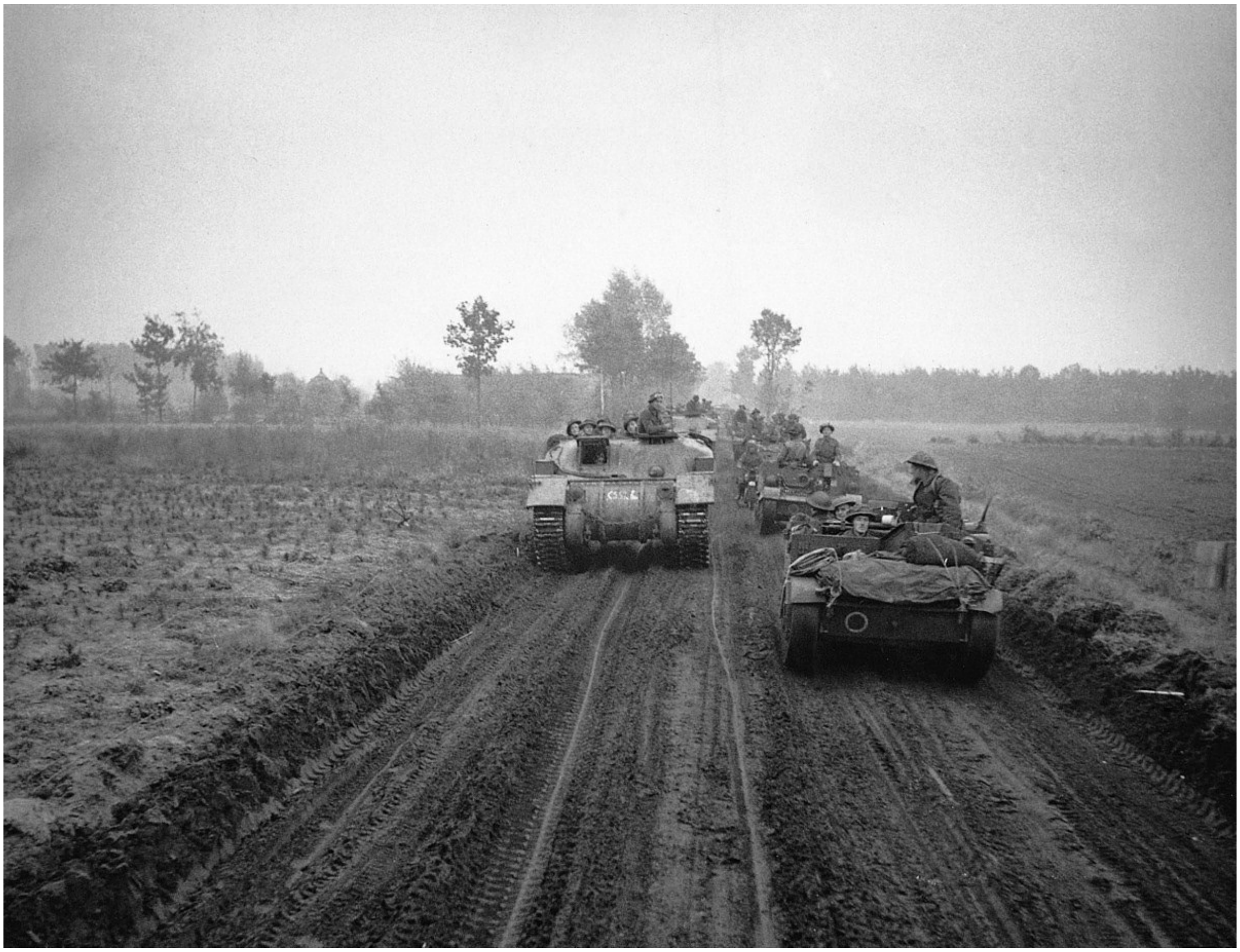
Operation *Colin*

Just before midnight, the party set off with the horse and cart for the Bosscheweg in the direction of the Kampina. Precisely on time, just as they left the Bosscheweg to turn off in the direction of Moorwijk, the artillery barrage that Tony Gebel had warned of, commenced. The area immediately surrounding the Bosscheweg came under heavy fire and numerous shells were landing in the vicinity of the farm. It became more and more intense and it seemed that everything in the area was going to be completely destroyed, everybody rushed for the safety of a nearby air raid shelter. The shelling lasted for over 90 minutes and then stopped. It had been a heavy preliminary shelling that announced the start of the Allied breakout in this area under the code name *Colin*.

Operation *Colin* was scheduled to start on Monday October 23 and was part of a larger offensive, codenamed Operation *Pheasant*, which had started on October 20 with, amongst other things, an Allied breakout from positions near Antwerp. With Operation *Colin* the Allies wanted to break out of their positions in the corridor near Eindhoven in order to reach Boxtel, via Schijndel, and break through the eastern flank of the German Fifteenth Army in order to advance onwards to the River Bergsche Maas.

Operation *Colin* was to be executed by the British 51st Highland Division. This experienced division was commanded by Maj Gen Thomas Gordon Rennie who, two years earlier, had fought the Germans in North Africa, during the second battle of El Alamein, where he commanded the 5th Battalion of the Black Watch. The 51st Division was to advance via Schijndel to the Omleidings Canal, near Boxtel, and the River Dommel, between Boxtel and Sint-Michielsgestel. These water obstacles would then have to be crossed to clear the area between ’s-Hertogenbosch and Tilburg which was held by the German 59th Infantry Division, under GenLt Poppe. From there the 51st Highland Division would continue its advance to the Bergsche Maas.

Maj Gen Tom Rennie commander of the 51st Highland Division during Operation *Colin*. (G. Segers)



Infantry of the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, 152nd Brigade, during Operation *Colin*, October 23, 1944. Through sandy roads they move up from St-Oedenrode to Schijndel and Boxtel in their Bren Gun Carriers, and Kangaroos, old Ram tanks without a turret. The Kangaroos were driven by Canadians of the 1st Canadian Carrier Regiment. (G. Segers)

A Kangaroo with infantryman of the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, 152 Brigade during Operation *Colin*. They are advancing from St-Oedenrode to Schijndel and Boxtel, October 23, 1944. (G. Segers)

The following day, October 22, Cees van Leeuwen went to the camp in the Kampina to see if Tony and his friends had arrived. It was obvious that everything had gone well and the Germans had been welcomed and were settling in excellently. Some of the Germans were walking around in American Army combat jackets, while some of the Americans had put on German Wehrmacht coats and others were wearing German field caps. The airborne troops had already thought of a nickname for Tony Gebel, jokingly calling him “Goebbels” after the German minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels. The food provisions the deserters had brought with them were, in any case, more than sufficient for the time being.

While Cees was in the camp, some British Typhoon fighter bombers executed an attack on Huize Leeuwenrode, where GenLt Poppe was still residing. However, the bombs missed their target and fell beside the house, some tens of yards to the west. Nevertheless the house received some damage with all the roof tiles loosened or broken and all the windows shattered. During the attack the general had sought safety, hiding in the cellar underneath the stairs, and escaped injury. However, once the Typhoons were gone, Poppe and his staff rapidly departed from Huize Leeuwenrode and the adjacent Den Eikenhorst.

Reconnaissance patrols

In the meantime in the Kampina Lt Sharp had been regularly sending out groups of his men to undertake reconnaissance patrols in the surrounding area. Sharp was still looking for any opportunity to link up with his own forces in the east or the south and with the sound of the approaching guns of the Allied offensive, the airborne troops were becoming restless. By now the group of men in the Kampina had grown to such a size that a successful breakout should be quite feasible. A few plans had already been submitted but each time the Americans had rejected them preferring to wait for more information about the Allied offensive.

One of the reconnaissance patrols was made on October 23 by Sgt Cutforth, who along with some South Staffords went out to the edge of the Kampina. On an earlier occasion he had undertaken a similar reconnaissance mission from the Pesterd at the Loonse and Drunense duinen. On this occasion he planned to cross the road and the adjacent railway line between Boxtel and Oisterwijk, just over a mile (2km) north of the camp, to observe reported German troop movements in the neighboring area.

Cutforth had picked Cpl Bennet and privates Weate and Julian to accompany him on this recce with one of the Dutch helpers to accompany them as their guide. They had initially planned to stay out for no more than two hours, but were informed by forester Wim Meijer that German troops quartered in the area were now making frequent use of the road to Boxtel and, according to him, any move beyond the woods would present a great risk that they would be seen whilst crossing the road or the railway line. After further discussion the men decided that it was better to return to their camp, to report and seek permission to undertake the recce the following day.

As had been agreed, on October 21 the helpers from Drunen and Elshout had arranged everything to enable Lt Sharp and his troops to return to the barn at the Pesterd. Late in the afternoon of that day Leo Elshout, David Elshout, and Ad Veltman left to travel to the Kampina to collect them. On their way they encountered large numbers of small German units retreating from the frontline and the nearer they came to the Kampina the louder the roar of guns became. Once they had arrived at the agreed meeting spot at the edge of the woods, a Dutch guide led the three men further into the Kampina to the British airborne troops, who were now situated in the woods to the east on the far side of the great central moor.

When the three men from Drunen arrived, they received a warm welcome but were immediately informed by Lt Sharp, that the plans had changed. It was explained that a lot had happened during the past few days and the whole group now intended to breakout and push through to the liberated area to the east of the railway line running from Eindhoven to Boxtel that night. The three from Drunen therefore decided it was best to return home immediately, by bike, to ensure they would be back before dark.

Towards the evening news came through on the resistance wireless that the whole front was moving. This meant that the German frontline could no longer be accurately established anymore and several American officers in the group stated that they preferred to postpone any breakout until the situation at the frontline had stabilised. It was decided to return to the other side of the Kampina again to spend the night over there and wait until dawn.

Very early the following morning, October 24, the troops heard the roar of guns becoming louder and louder and slowly approaching. Lt Sharp immediately proposed a breakout with the entire group to attempt to reach their own lines that morning. Once again the Americans opted to wait until they had received the results of a reconnaissance patrol to the front line, which some of the helpers wanted to undertake.

Having received information that the Germans had positioned two guns 1 mile (1.5km) away, Sharp decided to send a recce to that position. These German guns could pose a serious danger to the Allied troops if they chose to cross that area. It transpired that the Germans had positioned two antitank guns on the other side of the Boxtel to Oisterwijk road in the hamlet of Luissel. These two antitank guns were presumably intended to cover the German retreat from this area. One of the guns had been positioned close to Paulus van der Meijden’s farm.

The recce was again led by Sgt Cutforth and he took with him a scout section of five men consisting of L/ Sgt Stubbs, L/Cpl Pointon, and privates

Guest, Colman, and Tams. The six soon reached the railway line from Boxtel to Oisterwijk and the adjacent road running parallel to the railway. From here they intended to cross the road and move on to the German antitank positions at Luissel.

On arriving at the road, the section saw a group of German troops coming along the road in their direction, with what appeared to be a large horse drawn gun. The soldiers immediately dived into a ditch, adjacent and parallel to the road, and took up positions ready to ambush the approaching Germans. However, as they drew nearer, it became obvious that it was not a horse drawn gun, but a horse drawn field kitchen. When the three somewhat elderly German soldiers had approached close enough, the British soldiers jumped up into the road, pointing their guns and shouting at the enemy to surrender. The three German soldiers couldn't do a thing and were taken prisoner without a shot being fired.

While the Germans were being disarmed, a lone German motorcyclist was spotted coming from the direction of Boxtel. He too was forced to stop and taken prisoner. Almost immediately two more German motorcyclists approached from the opposite direction, and these were also stopped and taken prisoner, again without any opposition. Within a matter of ten minutes the British had taken six prisoners of war without having to fire a single shot. When they spotted yet another German vehicle approaching from the direction of Boxtel, Sgt Cutforth decided it best to withdraw with their prisoners and return to their camp. The approaching German vehicle turned out to be a staff car and when its occupants saw the horse drawn field kitchen and motorcycles standing on their own beside the road, they stopped to have a look.

A German officer got out of the car and walked cautiously towards the motorcycles and the field kitchen. It didn't take him long to spot the British and their prisoners flee the scene. He took out his binoculars and followed the group as they crossed the railway. Pte Colman and Sgt Cutforth were covering the withdrawal of the rest of the section, and aware that they were being watched, Colman took aim through the telescopic sight of his rifle and fired a well-placed shot at the German officer. From a distance of 55 yards (50m) he could barely miss and the officer collapsed beside his car. The remaining Germans returned fire but as Sgt Cutforth fired his Sten gun in their direction, they withdrew to cover, hiding behind their car.

Though it had not been the intention to take the prisoners to the camp, the unexpected appearance of the German staff car had left them with no alternative. With their prisoners at gunpoint, the group quickly moved on while the Germans on the road now began to fire at them with light machine guns. Without incurring any casualties the party reached the safety of the edge of the woodland and quickly disappeared into the cover of the trees. The Germans on the road made no further attempt to follow the British and their prisoners, staying on the road near their dying officer.

While the section was withdrawing deeper into the wood, Pte Tams noticed one of the senior German prisoners attempting to throw away a small booklet. Tams picked it up and examined it. It proved to be of considerable interest as it was a list of all the German weapons and regimental strengths in the area. After having been away for two hours, the patrol arrived back in the camp and while Sgt Cutforth went to report to Lt Sharp, the six prisoners were placed under guard and thoroughly searched.

Chapter 13
THE BREAKOUT TO BOXTEL

The liberation of Boxtel

While the Staffords’ scout section was on patrol to the hamlet of Luissel on the morning of October 24, a message had reached the resistance that British tanks had been spotted in the area opposite the canal, east of Boxtel. They were also told that since the previous night the Germans had been retreating from Boxtel and had dug themselves in along the roads leading west from Boxtel, positioning 88mm guns along three sides of the wooded area of the Kampina.

Early that morning Klaas Dekker, having heard vague sounds of those tanks, had jumped out of bed, quickly dressed and had gone out. He left Boxtel on his bicycle and pedalled a few miles eastward towards Schijndel. After he had reached the area of the Omleidings Canal, he left his bicycle at a farmer’s house and continued on foot to the canal bank. He carefully crept forward on the last part to ensure that no German were in the area. By now he was a few hundred yards north of the road between Boxtel and Schijndel and cautiously followed the canal bank while scanning the opposite bank for signs of any Allied troops. All of a sudden he spotted two British soldiers on the other side who had taken up position behind their Bren gun. Doubtless these were from the forward troops of the approaching Allied army. Klaas dived to the ground to get out of sight and, from his concealed position he called out to the two soldiers asking if there was an officer with them. At first he didn’t get any response, but when he carefully stood up and again asked for an officer in order that he could pass on important information, one of the soldiers left and disappeared to the rear.

Shortly after, the soldier returned with another soldier following, who was introduced as an officer of the 51st Highland Division. Dekker was told that he was in a dangerous area and that German snipers were active along his side of the canal. According to the officer, a British officer had already been seriously wounded by a German sniper that morning. Dekker told the officer that the Germans had left Boxtel the previous night and that he and his friends had a large group of airborne evaders in hiding in the Kampina. He told the officer that these soldiers would like to return to the British lines as soon as possible and asked where they could cross the deep waters of the Omleidings Canal. He was told that the bridges at Schijndelseweg and Onrooi had been destroyed, but that it was still possible to cross at Onrooi. He also told Dekker that there should be no Germans in the immediate area of those bridges and that he could safely walk in that direction.

Dekker quickly returned to collect his bicycle, and with him on one side of the Omleidings Canal and the three British on the other, they moved carefully to the bridge near Onrooi. First they arrived at the destroyed bridge at Schijndelsedijk; as all the rubble and rubbish had landed on the Boxtel side, it was hard for Klaas to walk beside his bicycle and keep in pace with the British on the other side. While climbing with his bicycle across a heap of rubble, caused by the demolition of the bridge, and having arrived at the top of it, to his horror he was looking straight at a couple of German helmets. They were sitting immediately below him and, at that same moment, they noticed the three British, crossing the road on the other side of the canal. Immediately the Germans opened fire with their light machine gun, causing the British to dive for cover on the roadside. One of the Germans looked back and saw the frightened Dekker desperately trying to escape with his bicycle. The German aimed his gun at Dekker but he managed to dive out of the way and swiftly depart, with his bicycle, in the direction of Boxtel.

After about a hundred yards, Dekker realized that he still wanted to reach the bridge near Onrooi in order to try to cross the Omleidings Canal. He turned left, hid his bicycle near the house of lumberman Voets and continued on foot in the direction of the bridge. When he finally arrived, it became clear to him that it would be impossible to cross as the Germans had dug themselves in along the dike by the bridge. Realizing that their presence would make a safe crossing impossible he turned around, collected his bicycle and, with a lengthy detour, returned to the place on the canal where he had first seen the two British soldiers. Upon his arrival he called out and soon succeeded in establishing contact again with the British soldiers. Dekker enquired if anyone had been hurt or wounded from the encounter with the Germans at the bridge. Only the officer appeared to have been slightly wounded in the shoulder, and the other two were unscathed. Dekker carefully returned to Boxtel and from there continued to the camp in the Kampina to report of his encounter with the British soldiers.

The Scottish Reconnaissance Regiment

Klaas Dekker arrived at the camp near Huisvennen at about 11.30am and excitedly told the British and Americans about what had happened to him earlier that morning and who he had met. Thereupon he was immediately asked to return to the Omleidings Canal with a message for the British troops. An American glider pilot gave him a handwritten note, with instructions that he was to hand it over to the British officer. With this note safely in his pocket, Klaas Dekker and one of the other Dutchmen, Ed de Bruin, left the camp.

Passing through pastures and following tracks the two went on their bicycles to the Boxtel–Eindhoven road hoping to meet British forces coming in that direction. Farmers living near their route told them that there had been no sign of any Germans or Tommies in the area all morning. Then the two noticed a number of armored military vehicles, looking like small tanks, driving in the distance. These vehicles were not in fact small tanks but were light and medium scout and reconnaissance vehicles, and Dekker and De Bruin noted that they were driving in the direction of Boxtel. Some country folk were also standing curiously watching these vehicles disappear in the direction of the village and everyone soon concluded that the vehicles had to belong to the Allies. Dekker and De Bruin warned the people to get back into their houses and remain safely indoors until the Allied troops were actually passing their homes. They set off again on their bicycles and rode to Boxtel with the intention of meeting the armored vehicles and finding an officer.

Once in Boxtel they arrived at one of the destroyed bridges in the center of the town but could not proceed any further. However, they also found some of the armored reconnaissance vehicles, which Dekker and De Bruin had seen earlier driving in the distance. These vehicles belonged to a patrol of the 15th Scottish Reconnaissance Regiment, attached to the 51st Highland Division, which had approached Boxtel from the southeast via the main road from Eindhoven to ’s-Hertogenbosch. Lt Gordon Dalton was leading the patrol and his vehicle had a wireless set that was in direct contact with the British main forces.

The 15th Scottish Reconnaissance Regiment. (G. Segers)

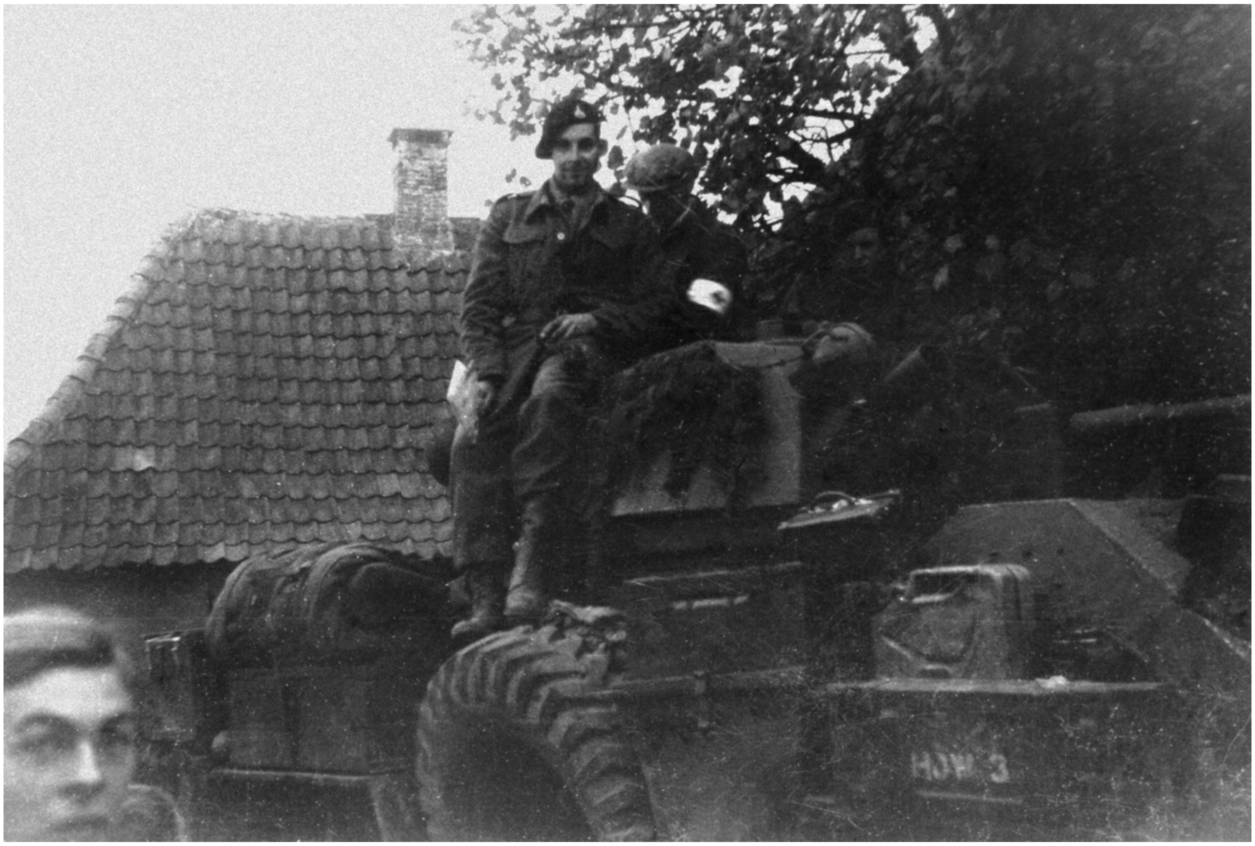
That morning, after leaving Best with a number of scout and reconnaissance vehicles, and after some delay during their advance, the patrol had reached a railway crossing near Boxtel. After a short stop Lt Dalton had told one of his officers, Lt Green, to remain in position near the crossing with his squad of Bren Carriers, while he advanced further on towards Boxtel with a squad of reconnaissance vehicles. During that advance Lt Daltons’ group did not encounter any German opposition but, halfway, they had suddenly come under heavy fire from the Highland Divisions’ artillery which had just commenced a barrage on Boxtel and its surroundings from the east. After Lt Dalton had sent an urgent radio message to his headquarters, the artillery barrage ceased and when all became quiet again, Dalton ordered his driver L/Cpl Berry to carefully continue their advance towards Boxtel. When they arrived at the bridge crossing the Dommel at Eindhovenseweg, south of Boxtel, they found the bridge destroyed so they proceeded west and followed the Dommel downstream to Boxtel.

Followed by the other vehicles in his patrol, Lt Dalton soon arrived at the destroyed bridge across the Dommel in the center of the village at about 2pm where he and his men where warmly welcomed by joyous civilians. This bridge, together with the other bridges in the center and in the surrounding area, had been blown up by the retreating Germans. The last German troops had withdrawn from the village at about noon and had disappeared in the direction of Esch.

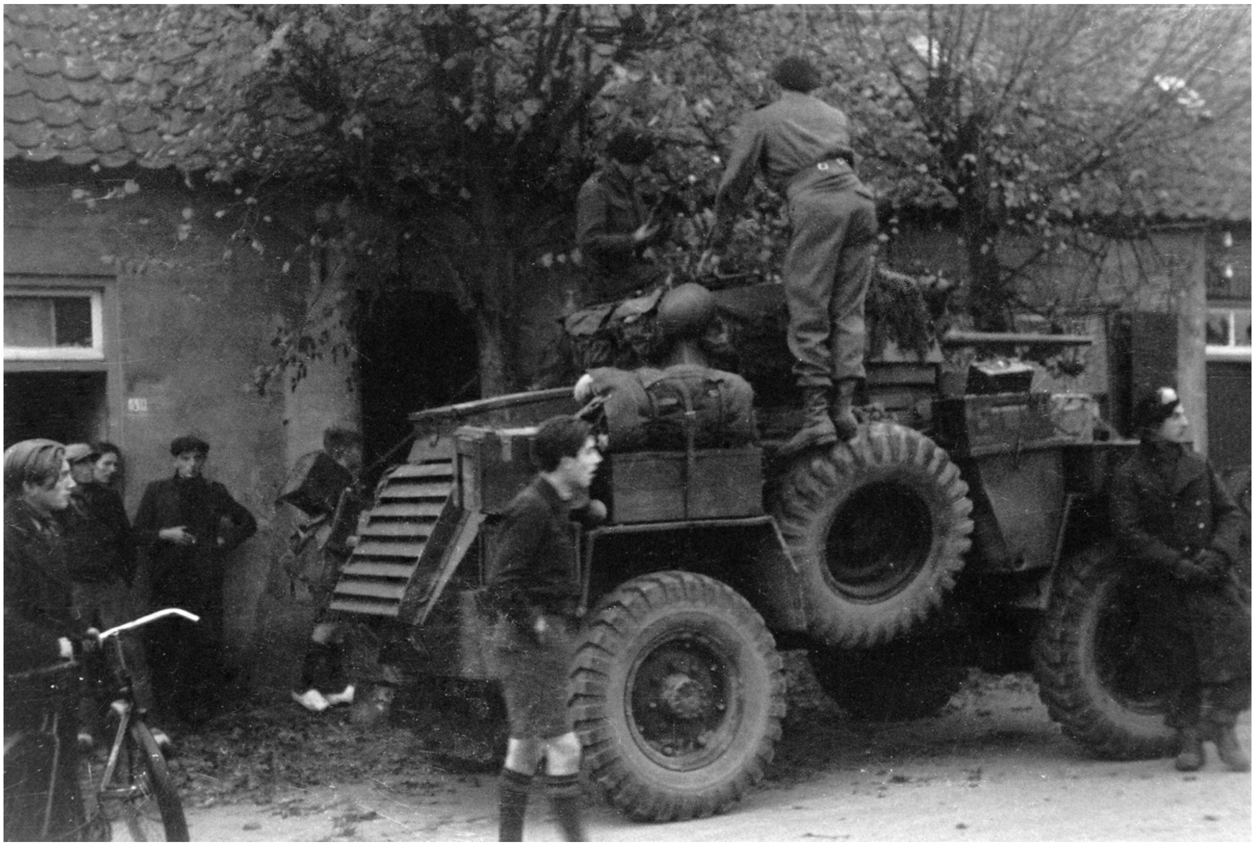
To reach the village center on east side of the Dommel, an assault section was sent in a small boat to scout the other side of the riverbank. Once there the men were welcomed by an ecstatic crowd and soon the message “all clear” was received back. Lt Dalton then returned to his vehicle to enjoy his haversack rations while waiting for the assault section to return. Some of his men took the opportunity to pose for some photos.

It was at this time that Klaas Dekker and De Bruin had arrived at the destroyed bridge and, seeing the Scottish reconnaissance patrol vehicles, approached Lt Dalton’s vehicle. Dekker introduced himself and handed over the handwritten note from F/ O Luton. This note not only emphasised the trustworthiness of its bearer but also stated that Luton was in hiding behind enemy lines with a large body of Allied soldiers, including some casualties, and were in urgent need of transportation to reach their own units. On a map Dekker pointed out to Lt Dalton the location of the camp in the Kampina and told him how the airborne troops came to hide there. He also pointed out the positions of the two German antitank guns, which they would encounter should they decide to go and rescue the airborne troops. Lt Dalton sent Klaas Dekker back with a written message which stated: “well done boys, we admire you.” Dekker was also told that he should pass on to the airborne troops the instruction that they should remain in their camp until help arrived.

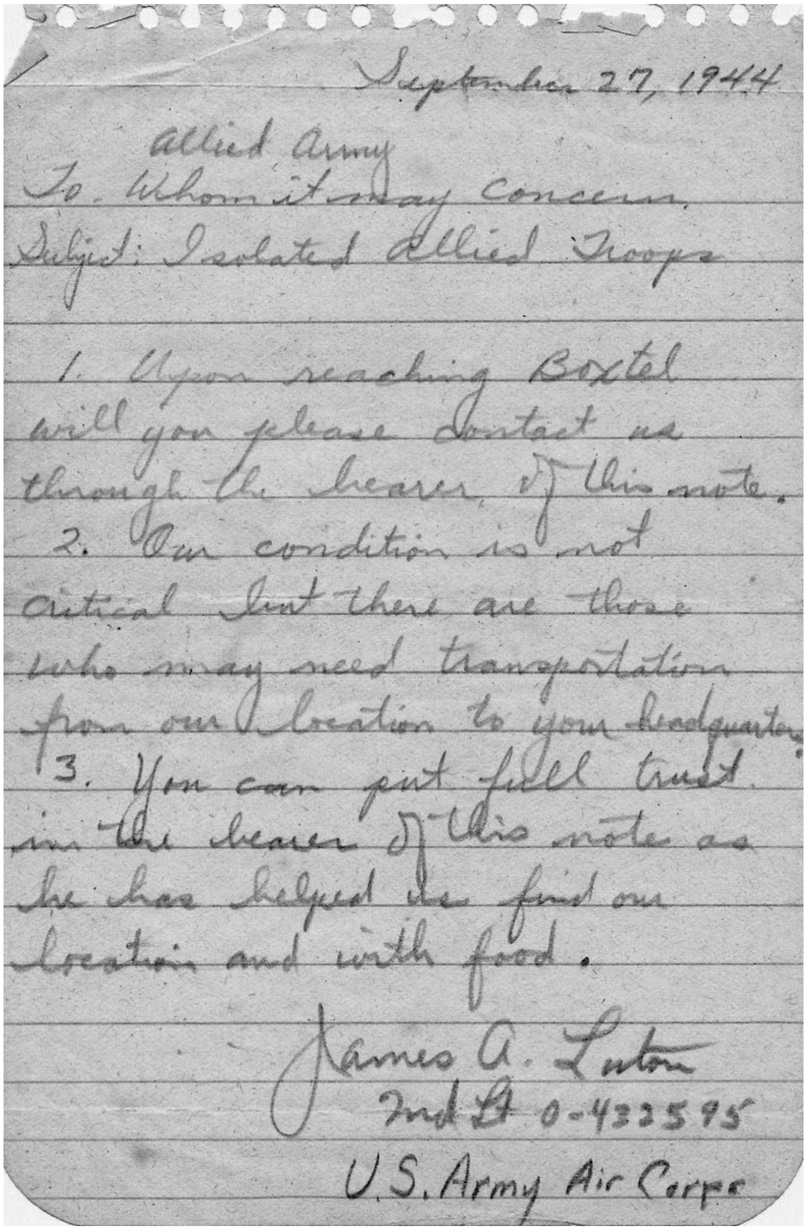
After Dekker had gone, the lieutenant contacted his headquarters by radio. To his regret, he was not given the honour of rescuing the airborne troops. That task was to be fulfilled by the Highland Division who were to liberate Boxtel in the coming days. Meanwhile, the assault section had returned from the other side of the river bank with the message that the Germans had left that part of Boxtel the night before to. At dusk Dalton’s patrol left Boxtel, with its joyous inhabitants, and soon disappeared, returning in the direction of Best.



A Humber armored car with two of its crewmembers on the gun turret and a civilian with a Red Cross armband. This photo was taken close to one of the bridges across the Dommel in the center of Boxtel. This vehicle belonged to the reconnaissance squad of Lt Gordon Dalton, October 24, 1944. (G. Segers)



The same British Humber as in the former photo, October 24, 1944. The Humber had a turning turret that could be fitted with a machine gun or high velocity gun. Its crew normally consisted of a driver, gunner, and commander. (G. Segers)



September 27, 1944

Allied Army
To Whom it may concern
Subject: Isolated Allied Troops

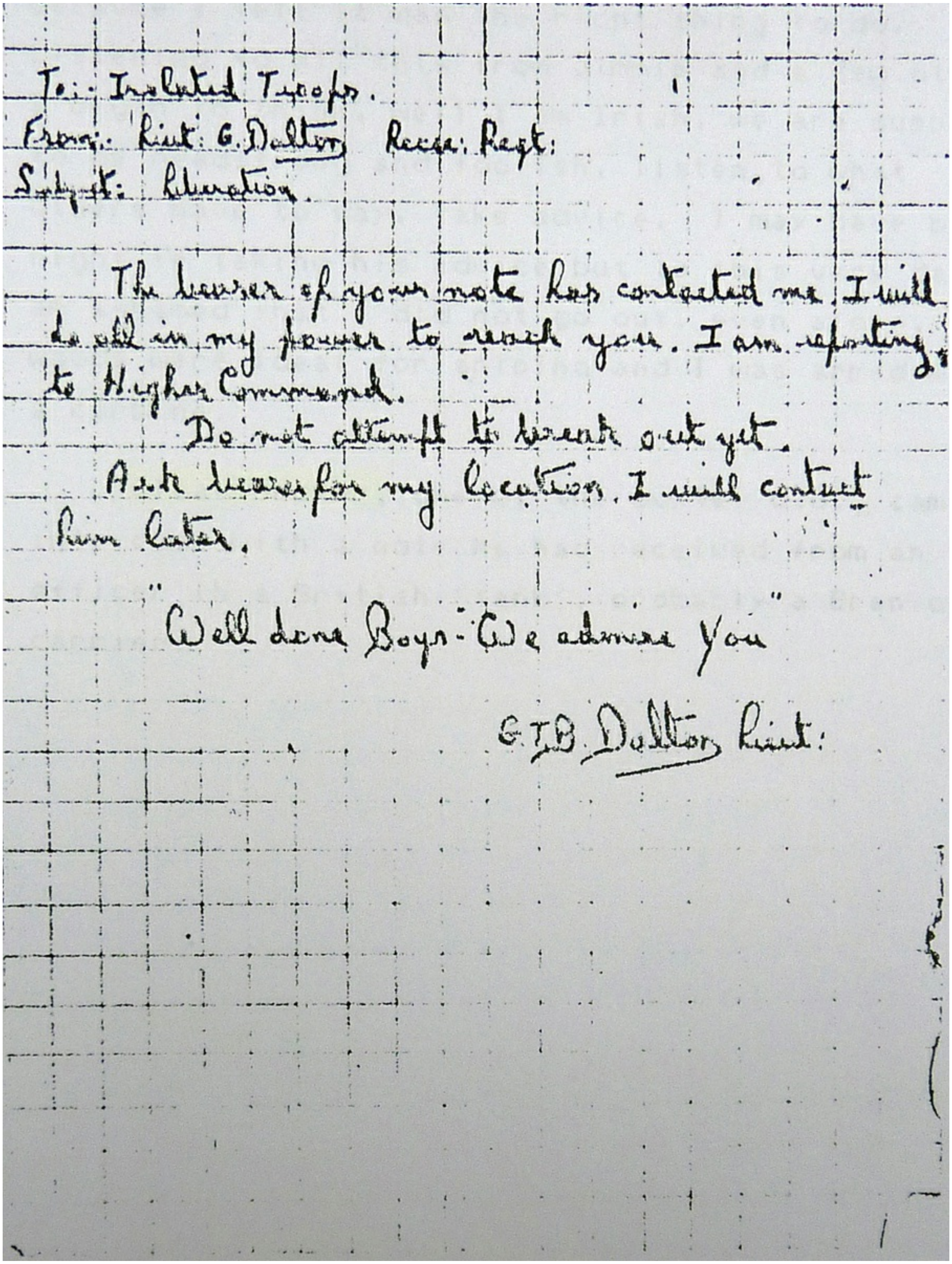
1. Upon reaching Boxtel will you please contact us through the bearer of this note.
2. Our condition is not critical but there are those who may need transportation from our location to your headquarters.
3. You can put full trust in the bearer of this note as he has helped us find our location and with food.

James A. Luton
2nd Lt 0-433595
U.S. Army Air Corps

The original hand written note that Cees van Leeuwen received on September 27. The note was written by glider pilot, 2/Lt James A. Luton, after the Americans had arrived in their new camp at the Beerze. Klaas Dekker received a similar note written by Lt Luton when sent to make contact with the British at the other side of the Omleidings Canal. It reads:

September 27th, 1944
Allied Army
To whom it may concern
Subject: Isolated Allied Troops
1. Upon reaching Boxtel will you please contact me through the bearer of this note.

2. Our condition is not critical but there are those who may need transportation from our location to your headquarters.
3. You can put full trust in the bearer of this note as he has helped us find our location and with food. (Jan J. van Leeuwen)



To:- Isolated Troops.
From:- Lieut: G. Dalton Recce: Regt:
Subject: Liberation.

The bearer of your note has contacted me. I will do all in my power to reach you. I am reporting to Higher Command.

Do not attempt to break out yet.

Ask bearer for my location. I will contact him later.

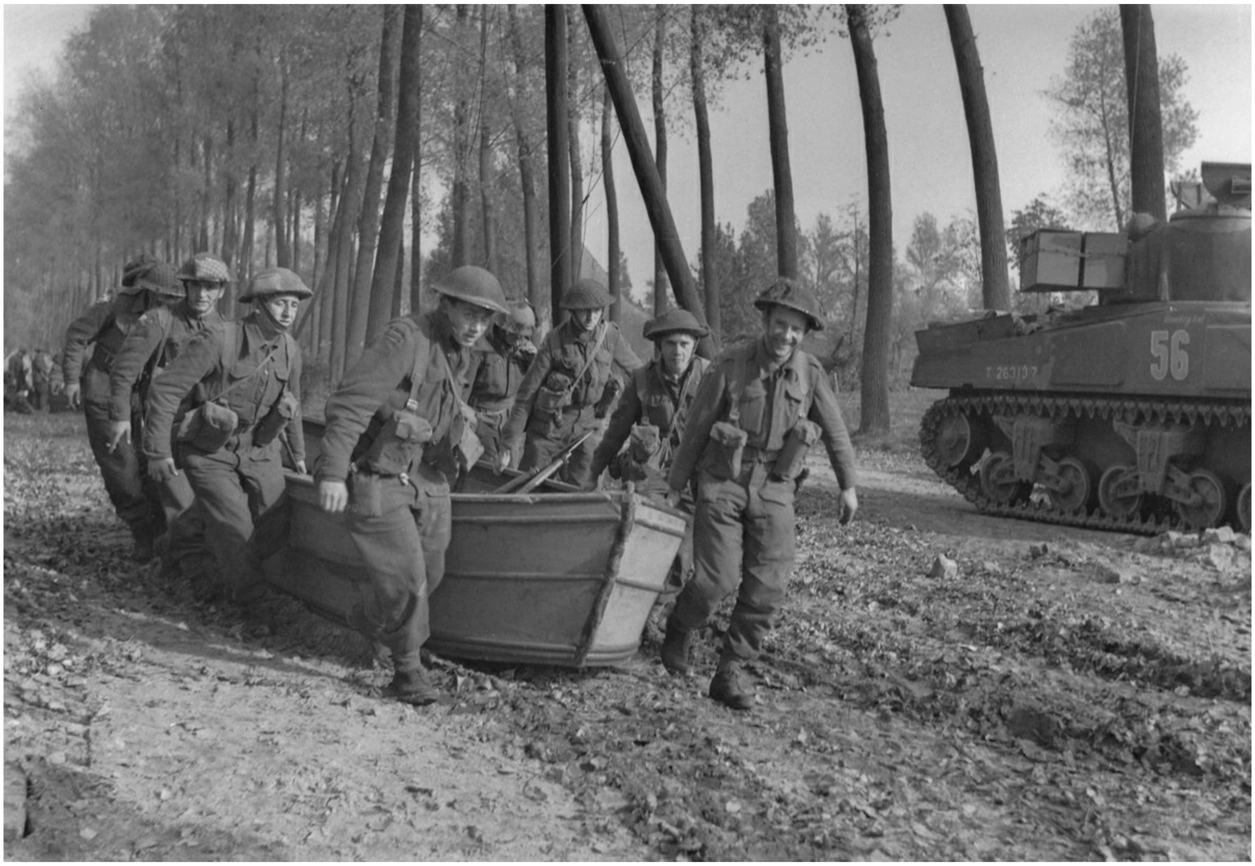
"Well done Boys" We admire You

G.T.B. Dalton Lieut:

A copy of the original handwritten note written by Lt Dalton. Klaas Dekker took this note back to the airborne troops. It reads:
To: Isolated Troops
From: Lieut. G. Dalton
Subject: Liberation
The bearer of your note has contacted me. I will do all in my power to reach you. I am reporting to Higher Command.
Do not attempt to break out yet. Ask bearer for my location. I will contact him later.
“Well done Boys – We admire You”
G.T.B. Dalton Lieut.
(A.J. van Hees)

Boxtel liberated twice

Earlier that day, October 24, British tanks had moved into position on the other side of the Omleidings Canal and fired on the farms of Munsel. Those farms were gradually destroyed as the British did not want to leave anything that might put them at risk from German snipers, and so fired at anything that moved. After the shelling British infantry soldiers were to cross the Omleidings Canal in boats to occupy the other side, form a bridgehead, and see if it was safe enough to build a Bailey bridge.



Infantry of the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders carry their assault boats to the Omleidings Canal under cover of a Sherman tank on October 24, 1944. Their weapons are within reach in the boats. (G. Segers)

For the construction of a Bailey bridge Royal Engineers cross the Omleidings Canal in assault boats. In the background one of the burning farms destroyed by shelling from British tanks, October 24, 1944. (G. Segers)

That morning, after the Staffords had returned from Luissel with their six prisoners, the entire Kampina group sprang into action. Inspired by their feat of arms, the first since they had landed in Holland, the British troops couldn’t be stopped and Lt Sharp wanted to break out to Boxtel. After the news had come through that the Germans had left Boxtel via the roads on the western side of the village, the British were ready to go, their weapons cleaned and ready for action. The resistance were able to provide additional arms and ammunition, albeit of German origin. Together with the weapons that had been seized from the prisoners everybody could now be provided with a weapon and ammunition. The Americans were still hesitant and would have preferred to wait until darkness until making a breakout, but they were persuaded to go along with the British. Marinus Verhagen accompanied the troops to the edge of the Kampina at Roond, where they would wait for their moment to come.

Meanwhile Klaas Dekker had arrived back in the recently abandoned camp with the British message. Not finding any troops there he found out, more or less, where they had gone and set out after them, catching them up at the edge of the Kampina. The whole group was there, including the German prisoners. Dekker handed the officers the note that stated that the troops were to remain where they were but Lt Sharp would have none of it and made it clear to the Americans that it would not be long before he and his men would leave. By 4.30 he felt that he had waited long enough and stated that he was leaving with his platoon. The Americans then decided that they would go with him so the entire heavily armed group set out for Boxtel.

Led by Lt Sharp and eight of his men, followed by Klaas Dekker, and the other British to the left and right of the road, the group left the woods of the Kampina. The German prisoners of war were surrounded by American guards and followed along in the middle of the group, with the other American troops behind them, and their Dutch helpers closed the formation. On their way to Boxtel the troops planned to attack a couple of German machine gun positions, however, as soon as they arrived at those positions it was evident that they had been abandoned and that no Germans were to be found anywhere.

The group proceeded carefully towards Boxtel, on its way passing many surprised farmers and rural residents. These people reacted very enthusiastically at the sight of the German prisoners of war in their midst, and immediately started to shout and to yell. At the request of the airborne troops, however, the civilians were told by the Dutch helpers in the group to remain quiet because of the ever present possibility of German troops lurking in the surroundings.

The troops advanced slowly towards Boxtel until they reached the edge of the village and castle Stapelen. This castle had a large moat surrounding it and was in use as a monastery. The group entered the courtyard to take a brief rest after their long and tiring march from the Kampina. It didn’t take Lt Sharp long before he left with Klaas Dekker and eight of his men to undertake a reconnaissance along the Boxtel to Eindhoven road expecting to find British forces. The others were instructed to remain within the confines of the castle until they got a message from Sharp.

During the recce, it soon became clear that the Scottish reconnaissance patrol, which Dekker had encountered earlier that day, was nowhere to be found and that the area around the destroyed bridges was now deserted. They did see a number of British tanks at Eindhovenseweg on the south side of the Dommel, unable to cross the river to enter the village, because of the destroyed bridge. It was now around 7pm and Sharp decided to return to the castle Stapelen. On his return they decided that they would enter and occupy Boxtel with the full group of airborne troops, their Dutch helpers included.

Castle Stapelen in Boxtel. (Brabants Centrum)

It was an impressive group of over 120 men, the German prisoners of war included, that set out from the castle to travel the short distance to the center of Boxtel, and the troops were soon passing through the streets of the village on their way to the market. The reception by the population of Boxtel was overwhelming, the airborne troops were welcomed as heroes and there was immense joy and relief evident everywhere. There wasn’t a single shot fired and the group marched through the village under the loud shouts and cheers of the population.

The group arrived at the market, followed by a few hundreds of ecstatic inhabitants. After more than four years of German occupation and oppression, finally their liberators had arrived. The German prisoners of war were immediately locked up in the town hall by the Americans and guarded under the supervision of S/ Sgt John Burke.

That evening the airborne troops stayed in Boxtel and drank fine old Scotch whisky, wine, and cognac and celebrated with the population. After it finally quietened down around the market, the airborne troops were billeted in nearby houses in order to be at hand should the Germans turn up in Boxtel again. This led to some discomfort for some of the men, because most of the houses on the market had few, if any, windows that remained undamaged after the Allied bombardment of the last few days. British glider pilot Lt Millar recalled that it was very cold and draughty inside these houses, with the men having to sleep on hard wooden floors, many of which had nails protruding through, puncturing their bodies all over.

Earlier that day, the 51st Highland Division had reached the outskirts of Esch via Sint-Michielsgestel, and thus also the adjacent area of Huize Leeuwenrode and the farm where Cees van Leeuwen and his family were staying. The two bridges in the village spanning the River Essche stroom had both been destroyed by the retreating Germans, and so the Allied advance had come to a temporary halt. Here too a Bailey bridge would have to be built.

During that Tuesday morning Cees, his family, and the Van de Vens family felt an awkward uncertainty about what was going to happen. Only a few Germans were to be seen in the area and now and then they were subjected to artillery fire forcing both families to seek safety in their air raid shelter. Then, all of a sudden the noise of countless machine guns penetrated the shelter and even rifle fire could be heard. Out of curiosity the Van Leeuwen brothers emerged from their shelter and noticed a small German armored car driving to the nearby road crossing and starting to shoot at something. Not long after, shells fell on the road crossing, followed by a deathly silence, interrupted only by some sporadic rifle fire.

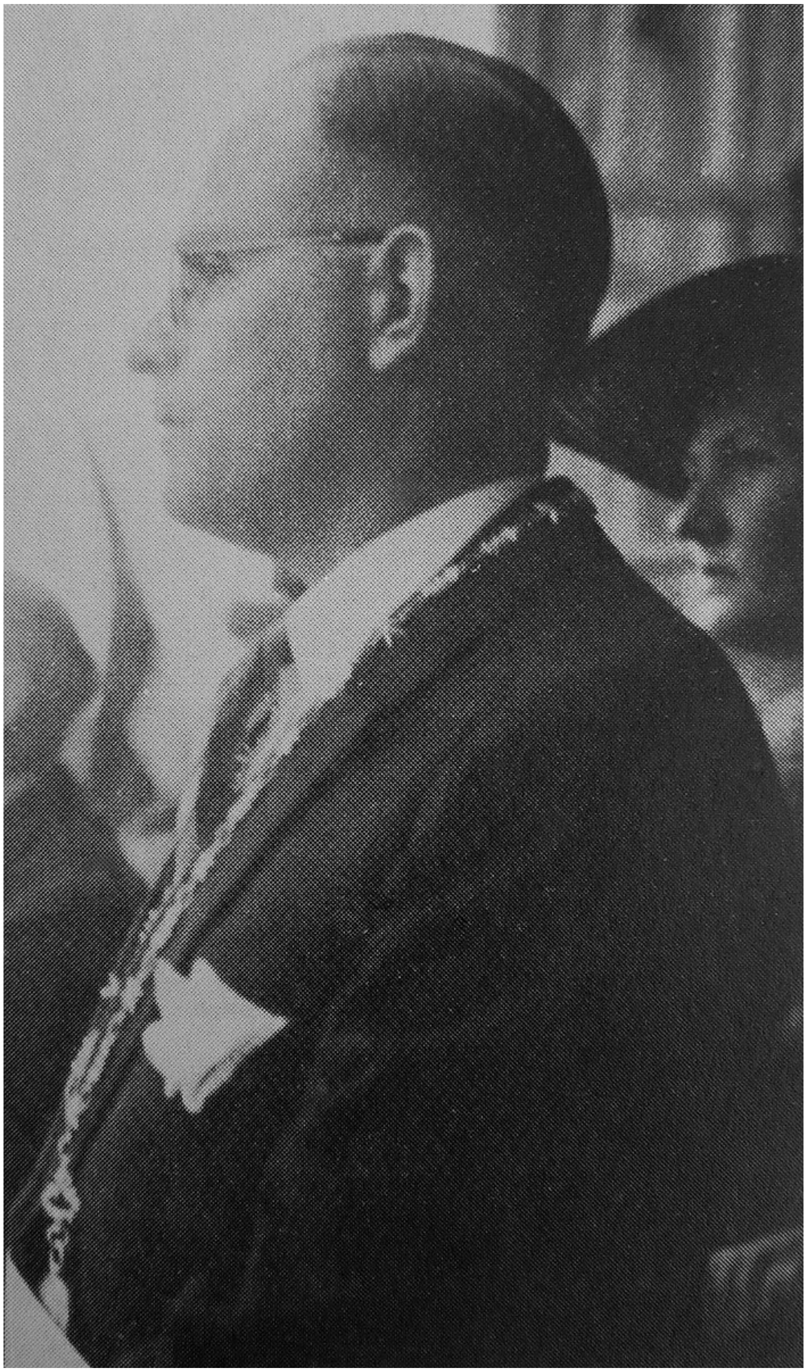
Once everybody had returned again to the safety of the air raid shelter, from a distance the rattling noise of tanks approached slowly. After Cees and his brother surfaced again, they saw a long column of tanks and army vehicles, marked with plain white stars, approaching in the distance. From the road crossing one long, immense column of military vehicles drove in the direction of Esch. The boys immediately took off from the farm and ran through the wood to Huize Leeuwenrode. Here the house was already full of Scottish soldiers, who were curiously looking around and there was not a trace of Germans to be seen.

A few hours later the lawn around the house had been churned up by the tracks of numerous Bren Carriers, while shells flew, with a high whistling tone, over Huize Leeuwenrode and fell behind the Essche stroom. In a neighboring house a communication post had been installed by the Highland Division. Here Cees and his brothers reported to a brigadier and showed him the written letter of introduction that Cees had been given by the Polish officer, 2/Lt Szegda.

They told the brigadier about the airborne troops and their Jeeps and the events of the past weeks. There was a good chance that the Germans had not found the Jeeps, so the boys asked for assistance to recover them. The brigadier did not appear to have much confidence in their story, but presumably because of the note of Lt Szegda, two soldiers were instructed to accompany them. They drove into the woods in a Jeep and there, sure enough, the two Jeeps were found exactly as they had left them.

The original letter of introduction that Cees van Leeuwen had on him, and that had been written by the Polish officer 2/Lt Janusz Szegda. It reads: To whom concerned.

That night in Boxtel, Mr Francissen was appointed acting mayor and preparations were made to arrest quislings with the support of some of the American troops. Together with Mayor Francissen, Grard van der Meijden and Klaas Dekker set out for the leading troops of the 51st Highland Division, who had now established a bridgehead on the Boxtel side of the destroyed bridge across the Omleidings Canal in Munsel. British engineers had been working all afternoon to complete a Bailey bridge, over which their tanks could roll into the area at dawn.



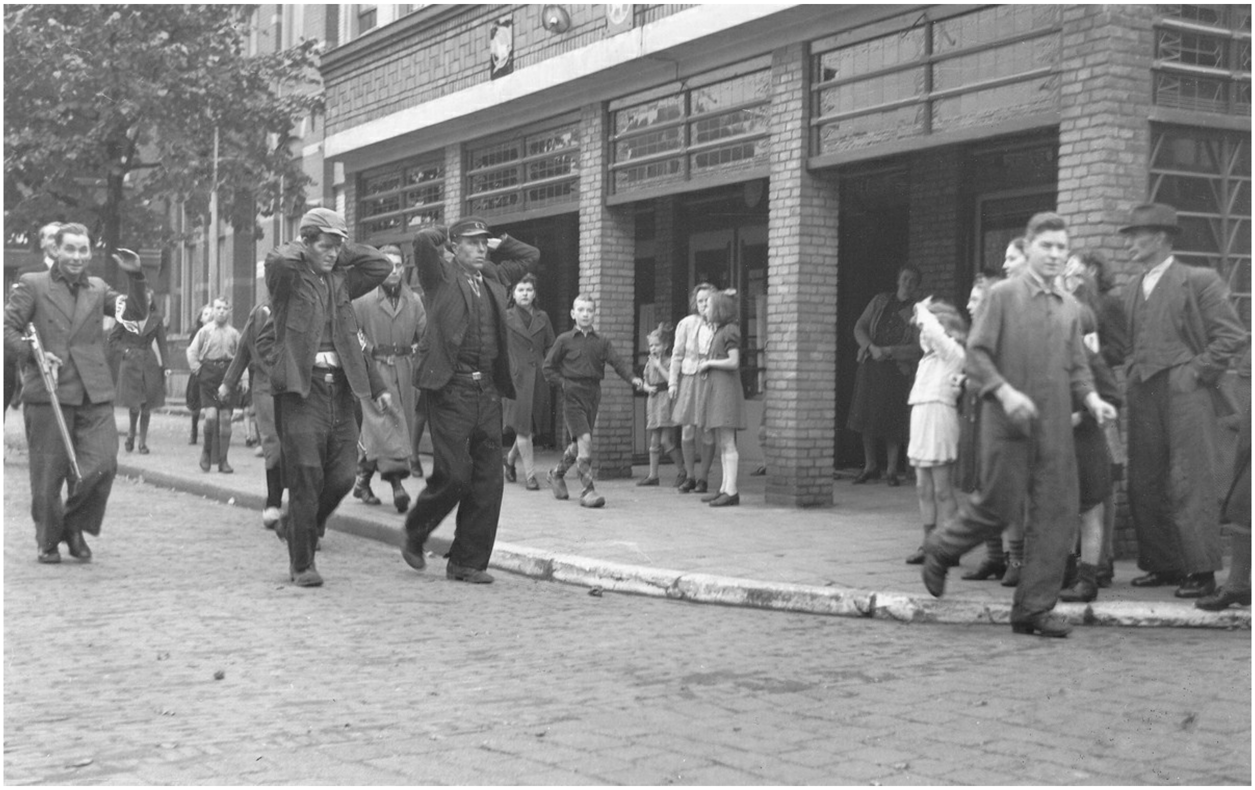
Acting Mayor of Boxtel, W.C.A. Francissen. (G. Segers)

At a farmhouse along the Schijndelsedijk, the road from Boxtel to Schijndel, they found a commander of the 152nd Brigade, who with his men had set up camp for the night. Mayor Francissen consulted with the commander in an attempt to arrange a transfer for the airborne troops to help them get out of Boxtel. Although the mayor went on to explain that all

Germans troops had retreated from Boxtel that morning, the commander did not appear ready to cooperate, and certainly did not want to accept the large force of airborne troops, nor enter the village and occupy it. Thinking that the commander might be suspicious of a possible German trap, the mayor offered to remain as a hostage while the others returned to collect the airborne troops. Even then the Scottish commander would not budge; he would advance into Boxtel only at daybreak. It was around 2.30am when Grard, Klaas, and the mayor returned from the British bridgehead to Boxtel.

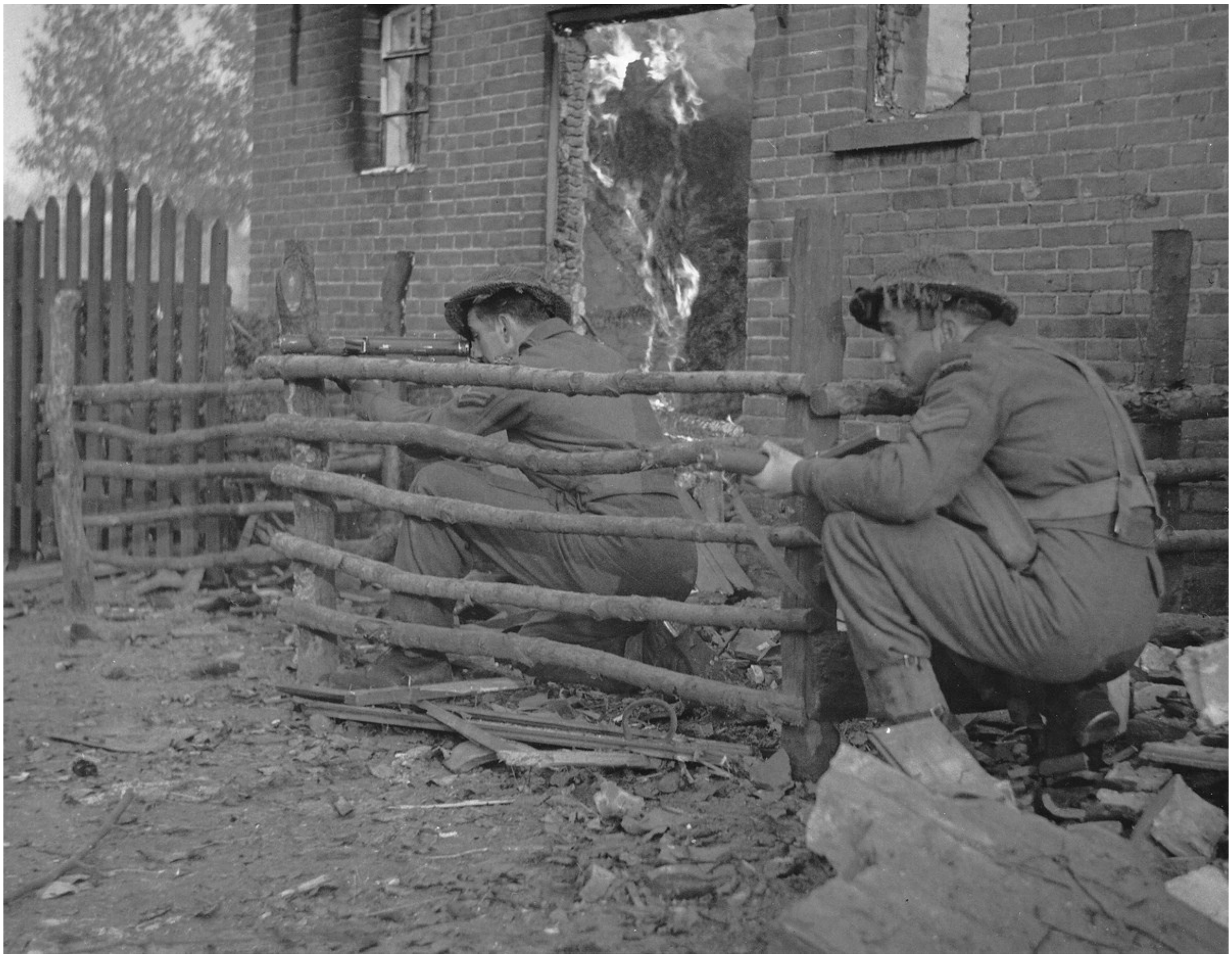
In the early hours of the morning of October 25 numerous Dutch quislings and collaborators were being arrested and, finally, at about 7.30 the first British tank arrived from the east to “liberate” the village. This tank had crossed the Omleidings Canal via the newly constructed Bailey bridge at Munsel and rolled into the village. When the tank commander noticed that there were already American troops in the village, he stuck his head out of the hatch on top of the tank and shouted out in surprise: “Where in the hell did you Yanks come from?”

Not long after, the first patrols of the Seaforth Highlanders were also seen in the streets of Boxtel cautiously searching for any possible German threat. These infantry men had left their bridgehead at the Omleidings Canal that morning, and now followed their tanks into the village. Fortunately, instead of the anticipated hostile German reception, the Seaforths found themselves being welcomed by the ecstatic population of Boxtel, and, standing in between them, their first liberators; the American and British airborne troops.



Quislings were rounded up after the liberation of Boxtel and marched through the streets of the village, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)

British infantry advances pass a burning building in the outskirts of Boxtel, October 24/25, 1944. (G. Segers)



Two British infantry soldiers crouch beside a burning building on the outskirts of Boxtel. Both men are armed with a Sten gun, a British 9mm machine gun. October 24/25, 1944. (G. Segers)

Two British infantry soldiers the same burning building on the outskirt of Boxtel. The squatting soldier is armed with a Bren gun, while the soldier behind him holds a Lee-Enfield with fixed bayonet. October 24/25, 1944. (G. Segers)

That same morning some of the American airborne troops went to a British command post to hand over their German prisoners of war. At first light other American airborne troops had gone in search of any Germans that might be left in the village and, after a while, took three of them prisoner. Those prisoners of war were also handed over to the 51st Highland Division.

That day Boxtel was liberated for the second time, but this time officially. At the market the troops were drinking beer and celebrated with the population of Boxtel.

After the festivities, the British and American airborne troops were assembled in the market and that afternoon directed to a Highland Division command post outside Boxtel. Their Dutch helpers accompanied them to this command post where, after being provided with something to eat and drink, pictures were taken of the large group. From here most of the troops were taken by lorry to Eindhoven where they were processed according to their units in addition to their names, rank, and serial numbers. When the information was all gathered they were divided and put in covered lorries with bench seats and sent to the Belgian capital of Brussels. From Brussels they would continue to travel to their own army units later on.

Two Americans, however, hadn't joined this group. They had stayed behind to visit some American graves at the churchyard of the Church of the Sacred Heart at Baroniestraat in Boxtel. These were glider pilot F/O Philip Jacobson and the C-47 co-pilot, 2/Lt William F. Baker. Both men were from the same squadron, the 72nd Troop Carrier Squadron, and had been told that one of their squadron members, S/ Sgt Harry Dunbar, had been buried in the churchyard along with several other Allied casualties. S/ Sgt Dunbar had been killed on September 17 when his aircraft crashed southeast of Boxtel near the hamlet of Kleinder-Liempde whilst returning from the drop zone near Eerde. 1/Lt Charles F. Nixdorf was the pilot of the aircraft and had been part of the same formation as Baker until both had been hit by German antiaircraft fire.

On September 17, several Dutch people had witnessed Lt Nixdorf's aircraft explode in mid-air after it had been hit by German antiaircraft fire. Shortly before the fuel tanks exploded and the plane crashed into the ground, the Dutch had seen two men leave the aircraft but had not seen their parachutes open. Later it became clear that the two men had fallen to their deaths into the middle of the village. These two men were the pilot and the co-pilot of the aircraft. The pilot, Lt Nixdorf had been buried outside of Boxtel and situated close to him was the grave of his co-pilot, Lt J. Crawley. Both men were buried in a field grave, without a coffin. Lt Baker took possession of the personal belongings of the dead Americans.

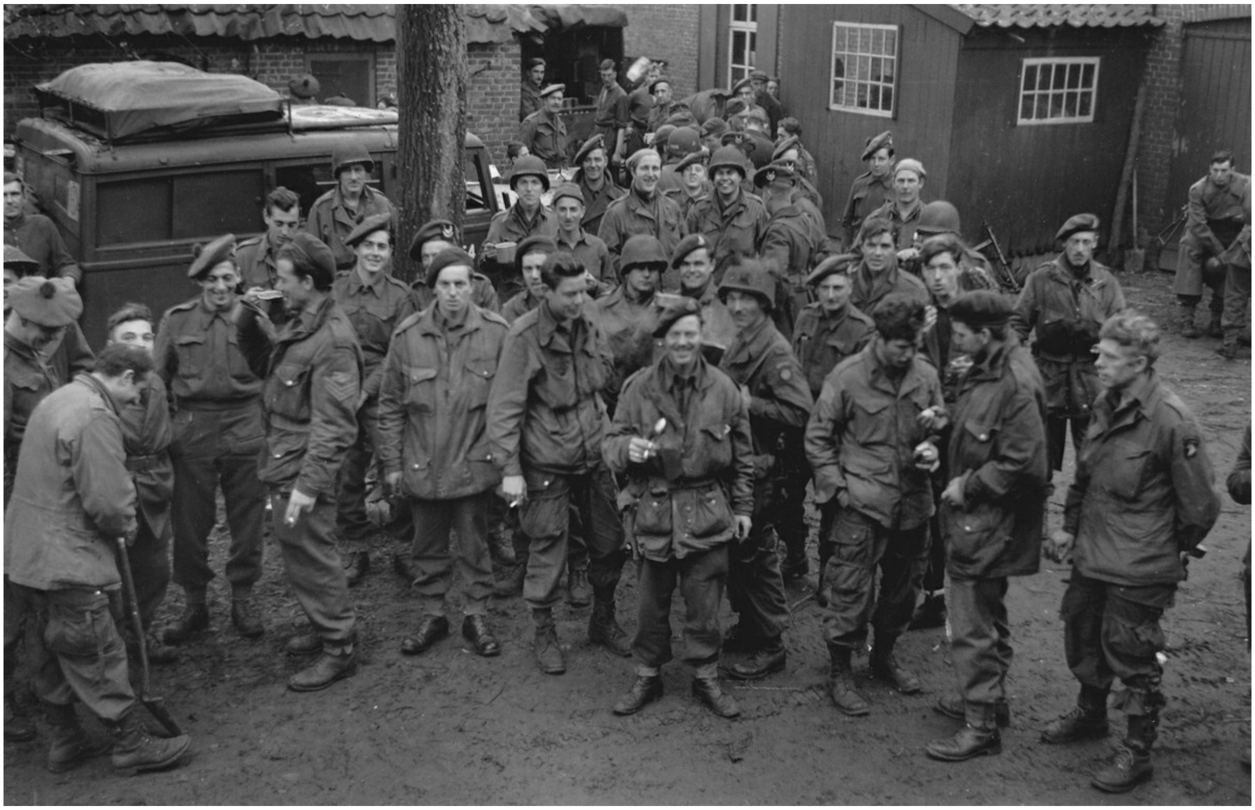
In the churchyard the two men found the grave of their fellow squadron member, radio operator S/ Sgt Harry Dunbar. The two sisters who had taken care of his body after it had been brought in told them that the staff sergeant had been badly burned and crushed by his fall from the aircraft. Jacobson and Baker also saw other graves of Allied servicemen in the churchyard, including American and Scottish servicemen, some of which had only recently been buried on German orders.*

* Baker mentions the names of these killed in action in his report of 29-10-1944. He also mentions that these men had been buried in wooden crates. They were: Harry

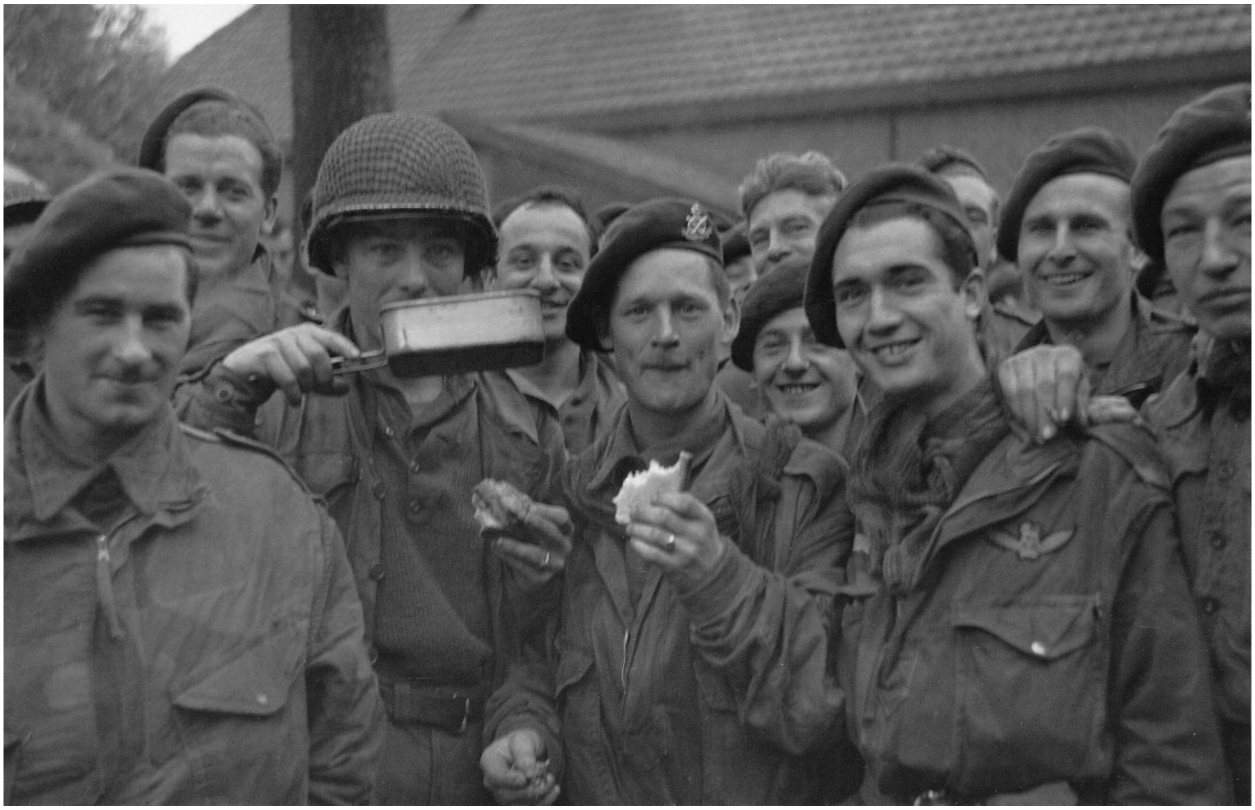
Dunbar: 35608861; Arnold de Renne: 31217301; Claude Schook: 34300092; H.C. Robinson: 34723896, brought in on September 20; Renninck: name written in clothes, brought in dead by the Germans; Arthur James Davies: 1652492, Seaforth Highlanders 7th Bn.

The population of Boxtel celebrates in the market. Between them are a couple of British airborne troopers drinking beer, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)

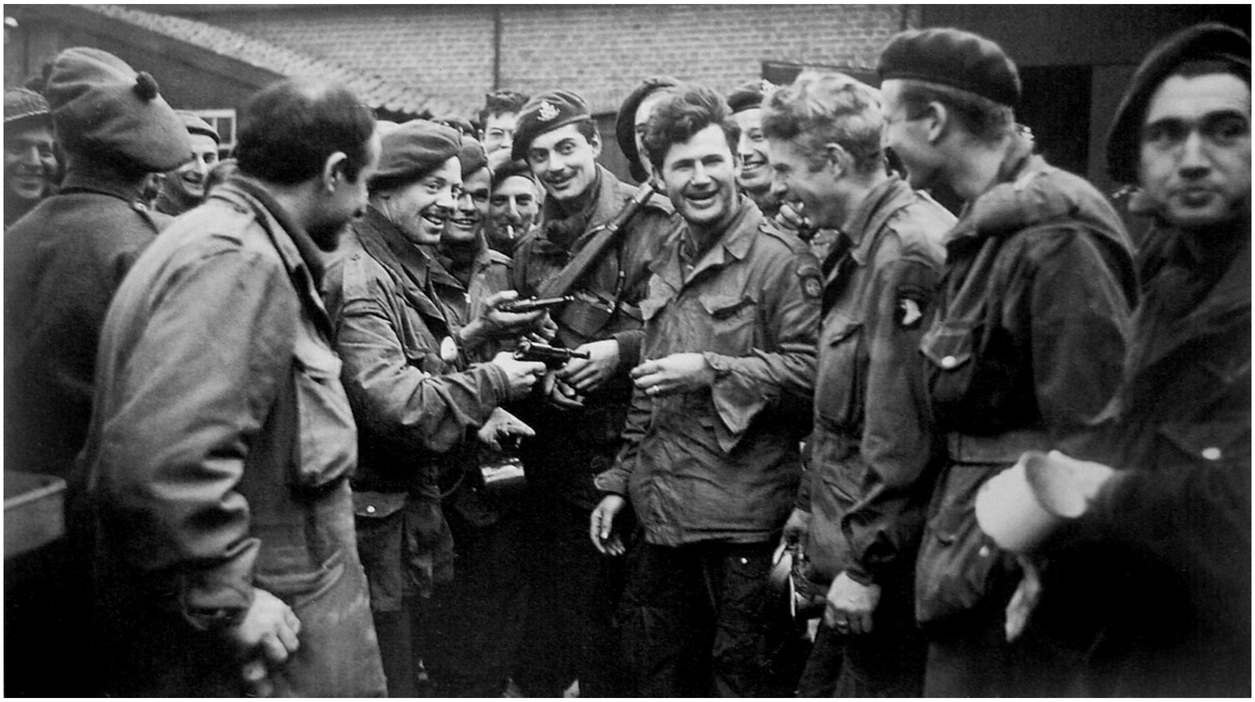
South Staffords smoking cigarettes in the market in the middle of a group of curious Boxtel youth, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)



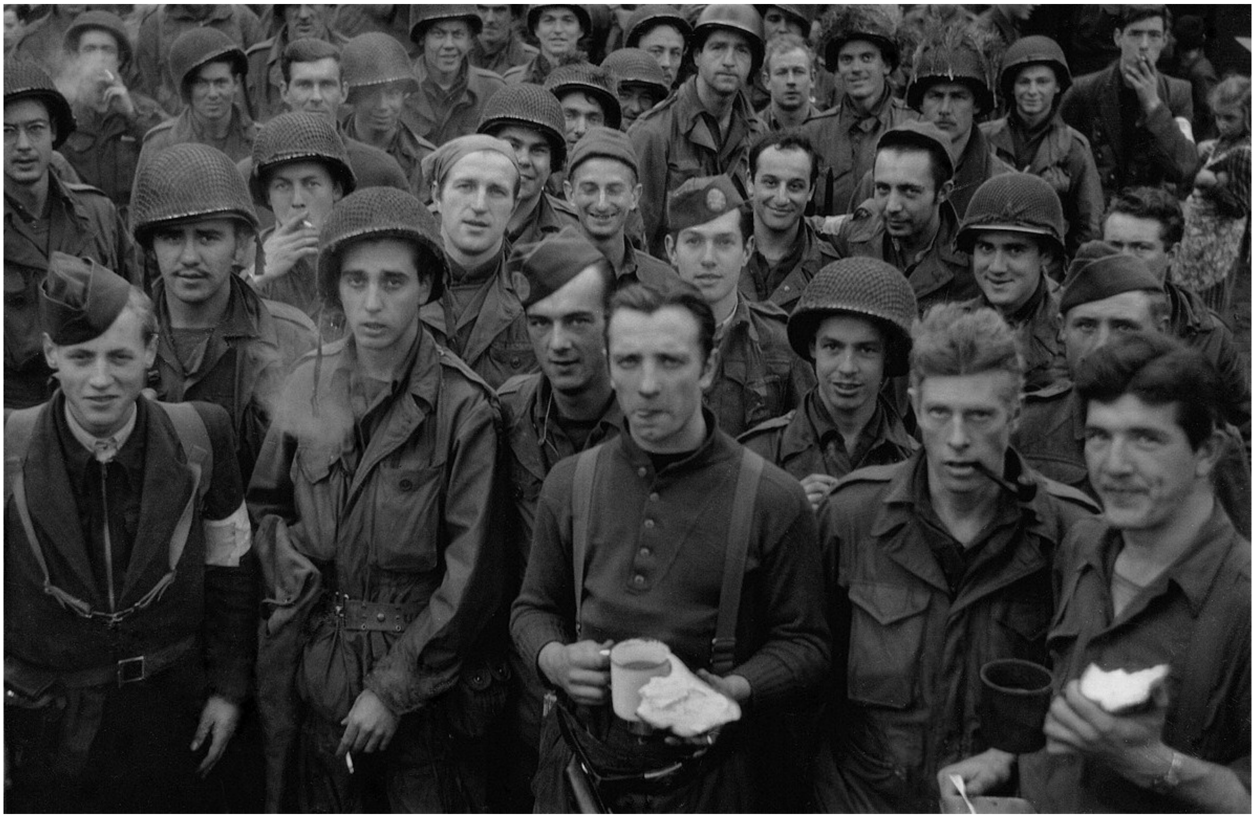
British and American airborne troops and men of the Seaforth Highlanders at the command post of the 51st Highland Divisions outside Boxtel. The soldier with a beret to the outermost right is Lt Roland Sharp of No.12 platoon the South Staffordshire Regiment. Left next to him is standing Gabriël Sauer, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)



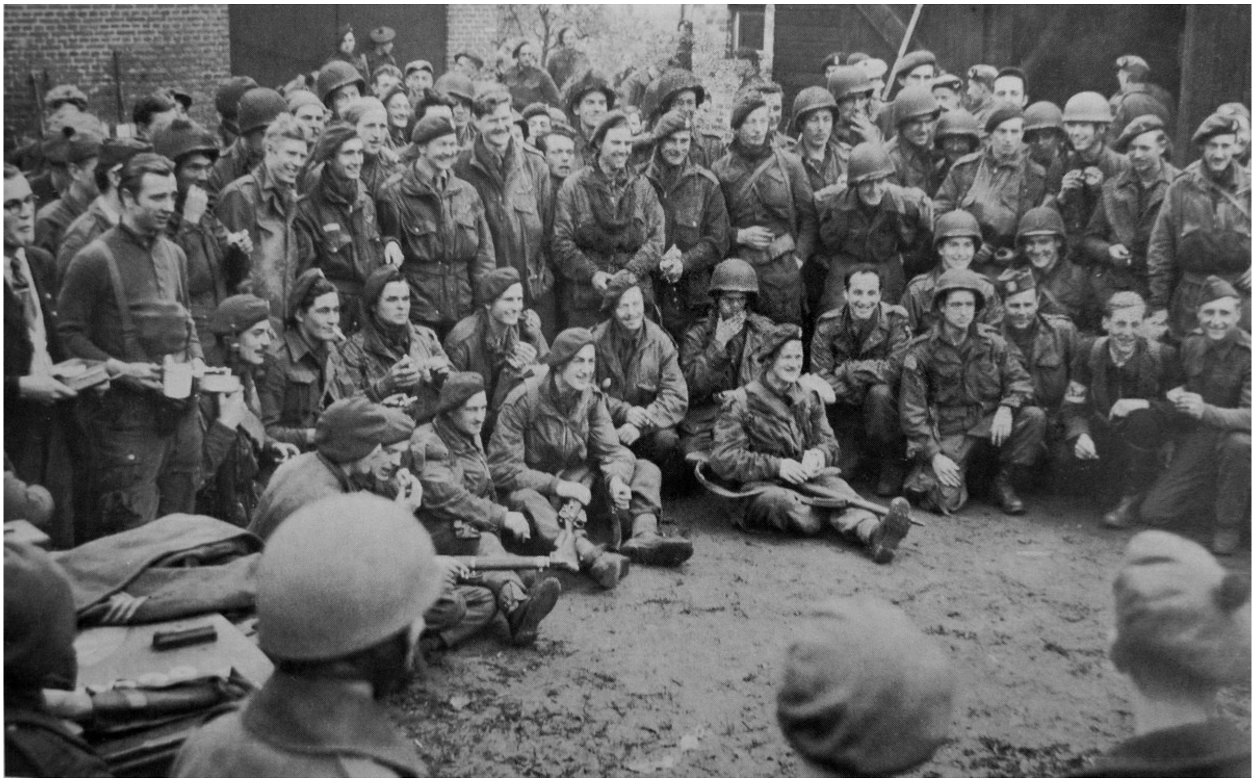
At the 51st Highland Divisions command post the airborne troops are served a meal. Pictured to the right of the trooper with the slice of bread is glider pilot S/Sgt William Potts. Behind him to his right is glider pilot Sgt George Stephenson, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)



Some airborne troops show each other their captured German weapons. Clearly visible are the shoulder patches of the two American airborne soldiers. To the right is the “Screaming Eagle” patch of the 101st Airborne Division and on the left is the AA “All-American” patch of the 82nd Airborne Division. In the middle a British airborne soldier with beret and South Staffordshire cap badge. October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)



A group photo of the American airborne troops. This photo was also taken at the command post of the 51st Highland Division. Below left is standing Marinus Verhagen from Esch and the man in the upper right corner with the cigarette is Gabriël Sauer, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)



A large group of American and British airborne troops with a number of their Dutch helpers, October 25, 1944. The troops are posing for the cameraman of the British AFPU – Army Film & Photo Unit – which followed the frontline troops. (G. Segers)

The airborne troops are transported from the command post of the 51st Highland Division to Eindhoven airport by truck, October 25, 1944. (G. Segers)

Upon arrival in Brussels on October 26, the airborne troops were questioned and debriefed about their stay behind the enemy frontline. The NCOs made up a short report about their experiences over the previous weeks and every soldier from the group had to fill out a questionnaire.

This large group of airborne troops had managed to survive for over five weeks, under the most primitive of conditions. Thanks to the courage and tenacity of the local Dutch underground, resistance movements, and individuals, all those concerned had survived their participation in Operation *Market Garden*. From Brussels they returned by plane and boat to England for a few weeks of well-earned rest and recuperation. After this period the American glider pilots were returned to the US and the American airborne troops were sent to army camps in France near the towns of Mourmelon and Sissone.

After just six weeks they would be deployed again on operations on the European mainland. An example of this was the Battle of the Bulge and the siege of the town Bastogne. Both the 327th and the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division participated in this battle and on

December 16 these two units took part in the defence of Bastogne. They were brought into action mostly in the southern sector near this town, and during the heavy battles that followed several soldiers that were in the Kampina were sadly killed. Among those known are Pfc Edward Kosterno of the 327th GIR who was killed on Christmas Eve and S/Sgt John Burke who was killed during the Battle of the Bulge. During their time in the Kampina it was Burke who showed the qualities of leadership that had inspired others. His judgement had always been in everyone’s best interest, including that of the British troops. Pfc Charles C. “Chili” Toepker of the 401st GIR was killed on January 16, 1945; he was buried in the American cemetery in Luxemburg, together with Pfc Edward Kosterno.

Two days later, on December 18, the 325st GIR of the 82nd Airborne Division was also directed to the Ardennes, where the regiment was assigned a sector in the northern part of the operations area. During subsequent battles in the Dutch province of Gelderland and during the advance through the west of Germany, several more airborne troops of the Kampina would be killed.

The 2nd Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment would not participate in any future airborne operations. After the battalion had been brought back up to strength after Operation *Market Garden* and the mauling that it suffered at Arnhem, it would participate in Operation *Doomsday* during May 1945. This operation took place in Norway where, among other units of the 1st Airlanding Brigade, the 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment were charged with supervising the surrender of the German forces in Norway.

How the situation developed in the corridor between the end of September and October

After the withdrawal of the 1st British Airborne Division from Oosterbeek, the battle along the corridor was far from over. The corridor was maintained for the time being, but it remained a war zone with German troops on either side of it.

The war raged on during the end of September and the month of October on the “Island” of the Betuwe. In the beginning of October the American 101st Airborne Division was directed to the Betuwe as replacements for the British troops. Here they stayed under the command of the British Field

Marshal Bernard Montgomery, and he deployed these American elite units as ordinary front line soldiers similar to the static trench-war situation of World War I. During that period the airborne troops were engaged in bloody fights with the German forces around Opheusden and Heteren. The 101st Airborne Division was relieved from the front lines in the Betuwe on October 27/28 and evacuated by trucks to an army camp in Mourmelon, France. They had been fighting along the frontline for 72 days and had lost more than 2,000 men.

During Operation *Market Garden*, the 82nd Airborne Division had lost over 1,400 men by the time that it withdrew from Nijmegen in mid-November. Of the 1st British Airborne Division more than 1,450 men were killed and only about 2,100 men were evacuated back across the Rhine on September 26.

EPILOGUE

The majority of the airborne soldiers who hid in the Kampina survived the war, and some of them occasionally returned to Boxtel, the village that they had liberated on October 24, 1944. A number of them since revisited the areas where they had been in hiding during September and October 1944 and during those visits they were still able to recognise and point out those places exactly. Warm friendships developed between the Dutch helpers and their liberators that resulted in a considerable exchange of correspondence over the many subsequent years.

In Elshout and Boxtel in the 1990s, monuments were erected to commemorate the Allied airborne troops in hiding. In 1994, in the Kerkstraat in Elshout, a monument was erected at the site where once the Sint Norbertus institution had stood. The text on the monument reads as follows:

A monument in Elshout. (P. van der Linden)

23 September 1944 – 17 October 1944

In the convent, that once was standing on this place, 47 men of the Allied airborne army have been kept in hiding by inhabitants of Elshout and Drunen, under the eyes of the German occupiers.

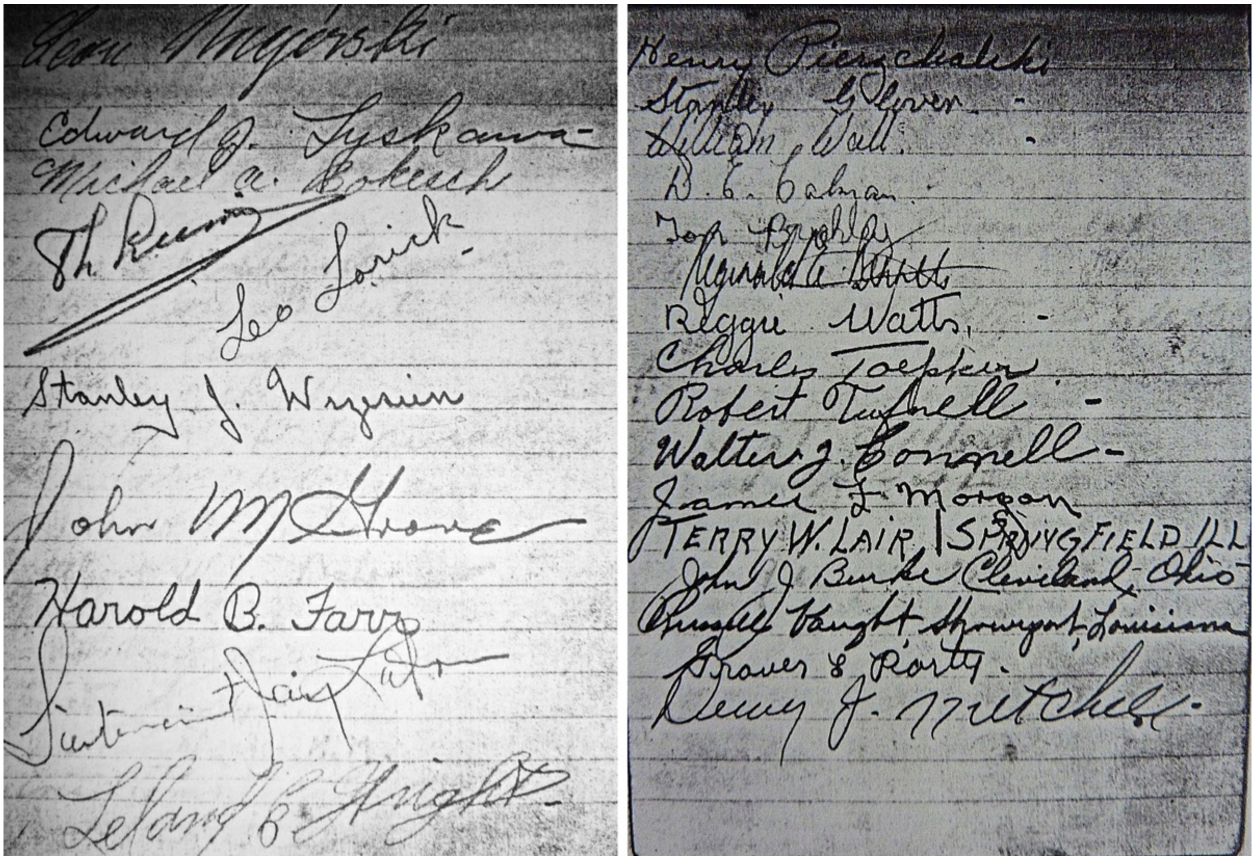
At the entrance to the Kampina, not far from one of the original camps, a resistance monument was unveiled in 2003. This monument, designed by L.A.M. van Houtum, stands as a symbol to the Boxtel resistance members, who helped the stranded Allied airborne troops. The monument consists of a plaque with a poem, written by an ex-resident of Boxtel Walter van de Laar, the son of baker Wout van de Laar and a Dutch poet known by the alias Victor Vroomkoning, together with a silhouette depicting a member of the resistance on a bicycle with, between his legs, a milk churn and a tree in the background. Left and right of the silhouette are two small memorial walls standing, with on each three plaques, with amongst others, the names of the members of the resistance and helpful civilians. The text below the silhouette reads: “Everything has been in vain, if we forget.”

Resistance monument in the Kampina. (P. van der Linden)

The Allied troops who had been put up in and around the Kampina and the Loonse en Drunense duinen are in this context all defined as airborne troops. These airborne troops were mostly men of the British 1st Airborne Division and the American 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions. This group also counted a number of British glider pilots of the British Glider Pilot Regiment, American glider pilots of Troop Carrier Command, and Army Air Forces personnel of the 9th Air Force. For some of the airborne troops Operation *Market Garden* was not their first war mission as they had already been deployed in earlier missions, such as Operation *Overlord*, the invasion of Normandy.

During the last days of their stay in the Kampina, a number of other Allied military servicemen were brought into to the camp. Who these servicemen were, or how many, has not been established. All that is known is that they were members of the 8th and 9th Air Force, and in Koskimaki's book *Hell's* Highway Pfc Bokesch recalls that amongst them were a fighter pilot and bomber crew members.) Several of them had been shot down up to two years before and had been hiding all that time with the aid of the underground. Also some civilians who for various reasons had to hide from the Germans found refuge amongst the airborne troops in their camp at Huisvennen. Amongst these was a former Polish NCO by the name of Leon Nagórski. Nagórski served in the Polish Army during the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, and was forced to serve in the German Army after the Polish surrender. He had come to Holland with the German Army and was stationed in the area of the Kampina during *Market Garden*. Just like the German Tony Gebel, Leon Nagórski managed to desert the German Army and join the Kampina airborne troops.

In the past, several publications have mentioned that 106 Allied troops had been hiding in the Kampina. How this number has been ascertained and who these 106 Allied troops were, has never been established. During my research for this book, I have been able to identify 61 Americans, 35 British, one Pole, and one Dutchman. At least 82 of these men belonged to Allied airborne units. The group further consisted of five American Waco glider pilots and five British Horsa glider pilots. Six were crew members of the two American C-47 Skytrain transport aircraft, of which one was a tug aircraft and the other a troop carrier. The details of all these troops are listed in the following appendices.



Leon Majorski

Edward J. Tyskawa-

Michael A. Bokeach

Leo Lorick-

Stanley J. Wzyrun

John McGrone

Harold B. Farr

Leland C. Knight-

Henry Pierzchalski

Stanley G. Glover -

William Wall. .

D. E. Colman.

Tom Brophy

~~Reginald Watts~~

Reggie Watts, -

Charles Toepfer.

Robert Tufnell -

Walter J. Connell -

James L. Morgan

TERRY W. LAIR | SPRINGFIELD ILL

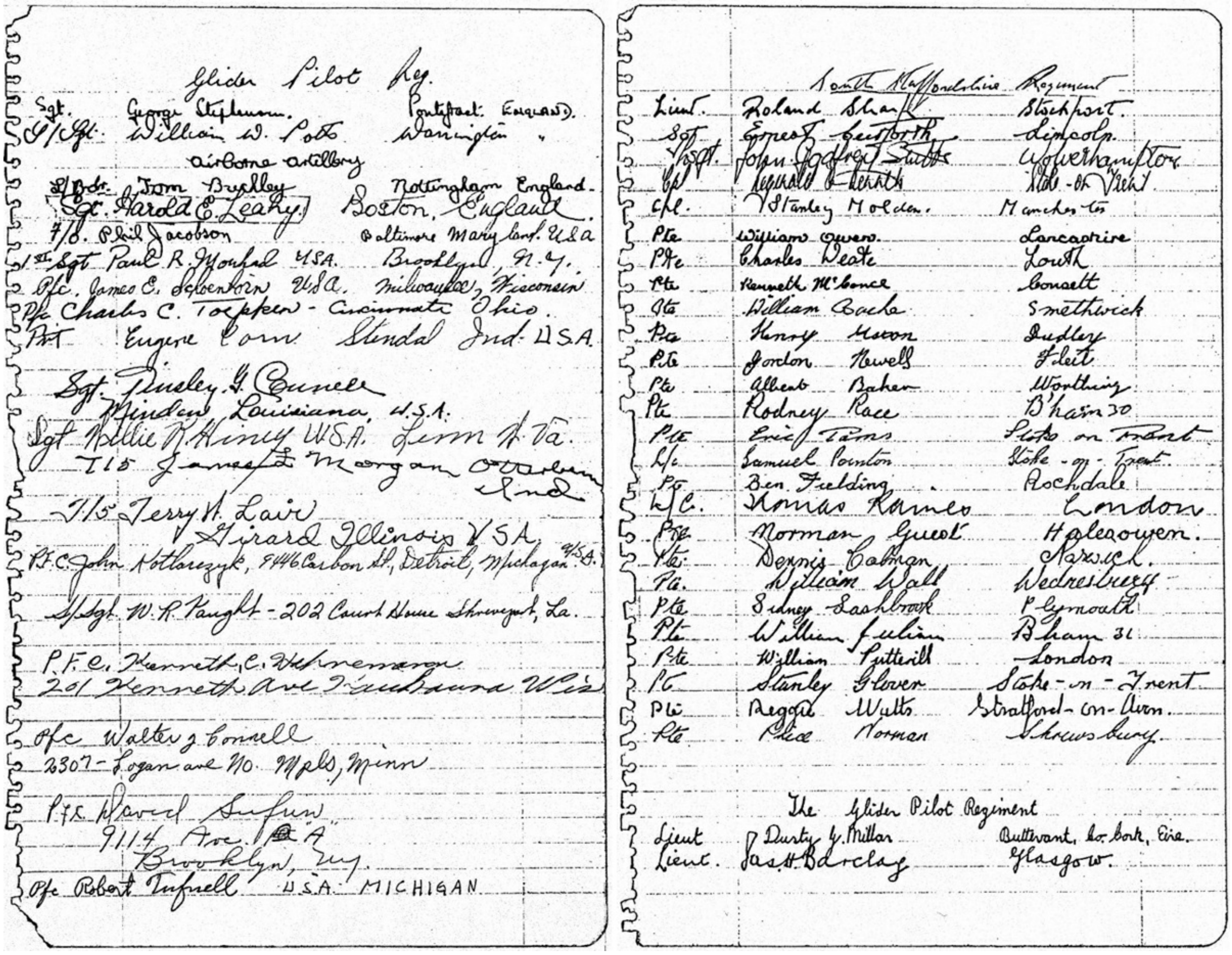
John J Burke Cleveland, Ohio

Russell Vaught Shreveport, Louisiana

Graves & Rorty.

Denny J. Mitchell.

Two pages from the small notebook of Cris Verwey from Boxtel. They contain the signatures of a large number of airborne troops. (G. Segers)



Glider Pilot Reg.

Sgt. George Stephenson. Pontefract. ENGLAND.
S/Sgt. William W. Potts Warrington "
airborne artillery
L/Bdr. Tom Buckley Nottingham England.
Sgt. Harold E. Leahy. Boston, England.
T/5. Phil Jacobson Baltimore Maryland. U.S.A
1st Sgt Paul R. Monfred USA. Brooklyn, N.Y.
Pfc. James E. Schoenborn USA. Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Pfc Charles C. Toepfer - Cincinnati Ohio.
Pvt Eugene Corn Stendal Ind. U.S.A.

Sgt. Pinsley G. Cunell
Minden Louisiana, U.S.A.
Sgt Willie R. Hiney USA. Fern W. Va.
T/5 James E. Morgan Otterbein
Ind

T/5 Terry H. Lair
Girard Illinois USA.
PFC John Kotlarczyk, 9446 Carbon St., Detroit, Michigan U.S.A.

S/Sgt. W. R. Vaught - 202 Court House Shreveport, La.

P.F.C. Kenneth C. Wehrmann
201 Kenneth Ave Kaukauna Wis

Pfc Walter J. Connell
2307 - Logan ave No. Mpls, Minn

P.F.C. David Sufun
9114 Ave. "A"
Brooklyn, N.Y.
Pfc Robert Tufnell U.S.A. MICHIGAN

South Staffordshire Regiment

Lieut.	Roland Sharp	Stockport.
Sgt	Ernest Easthorth	Lincoln.
L/Sgt.	John Godfrey Stubbs	Wolverhampton
Cpl	Reginald E. Bennett	Stoke-on-Trent
Cpl.	Stanley Molden.	Manchester
Pte	William Owens.	Lancashire
Pte	Charles Deate	Louth
Pte	Kenneth McConce	Consett
Pte	William Cooke	Smethwick
Pte	Henry Mason	Dudley
Pte	Gordon Newell	Fleet
Pte	Albert Baker	Worthing
Pte	Rodney Race	B'ham 30
Pte	Eric Tams	Stoke on Trent
L/c	Samuel Pointon	Stoke-on-Trent
Pte	Ben Fielding	Rochdale
L/C.	Thomas Raines	London
Pte	Norman Guest	Halesowen.
Pte	Dennis Colman	Norwich.
Pte.	William Wall	Wednesbury
Pte	Sidney Lashbrook	Plymouth
Pte	William Julian	B'ham 31
Pte	William Putterill	London
Pte	Stanley Glover	Stoke-on-Trent
Pte	Reggie Watts	Stratford-on-Avon.
Pte	Rice Norman	Shrewsbury.

The Glider Pilot Regiment

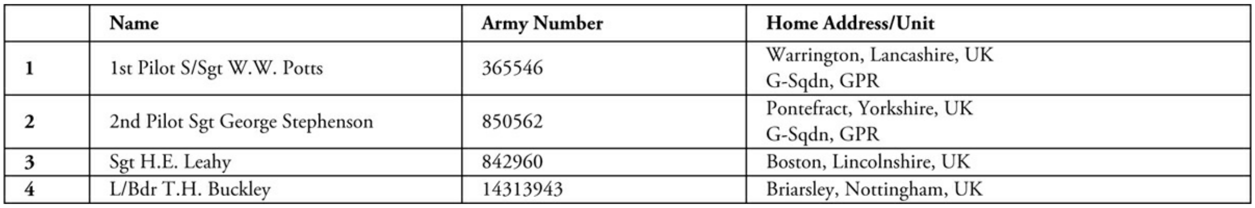
Lieut	Dusty G. Millar	Buttevant, Co. Cork, Eire.
Lieut.	Jas. H. Barclay	Glasgow.

Two pages from an Elshout school notebook with the names of the American and British airborne troops who had been in hiding in the Sint Norbertus Institution in Elshout. (J. Korsten)

APPENDICES

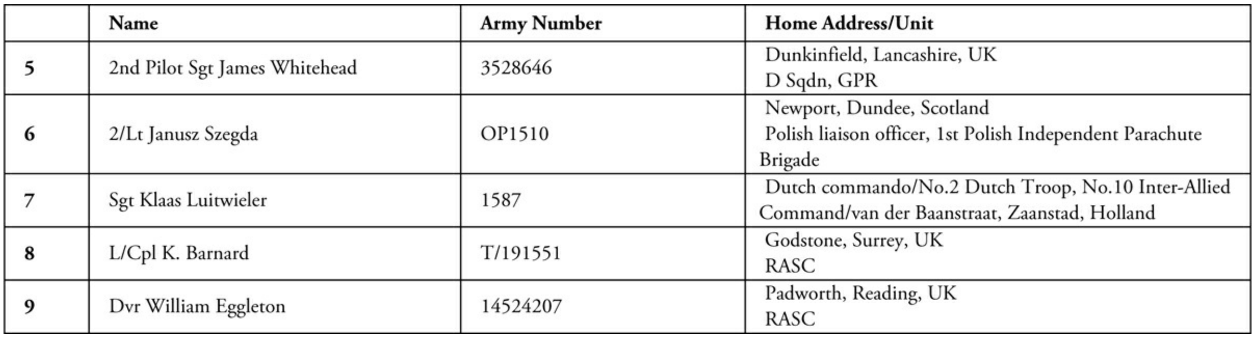
Appendix 1: The Airborne evaders of the Kampina forest

September 17: British Horsa glider Chalk Number 509 on the Ontginning/Helvoirtse heide at Hoef ten Halve/Helvoirt.
Onboard: 3rd Battery, 1st Airlanding Light Regiment, Royal Artillery (No.1 gun F-Troop)



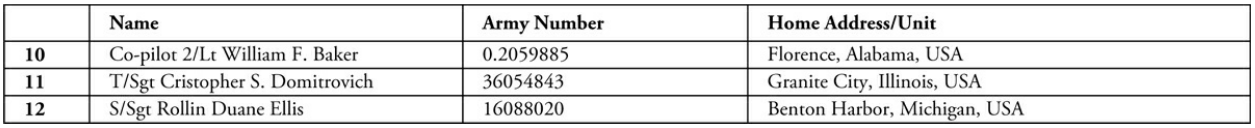
	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
1	1st Pilot S/Sgt W.W. Potts	365546	Warrington, Lancashire, UK G-Sqdn, GPR
2	2nd Pilot Sgt George Stephenson	850562	Pontefract, Yorkshire, UK G-Sqdn, GPR
3	Sgt H.E. Leahy	842960	Boston, Lincolnshire, UK
4	L/Bdr T.H. Buckley	14313943	Briarsley, Nottingham, UK

September 17: British Horsa glider Chalk Number 478 at Biezenmortel.
Onboard: 1st British Parachute Brigade, H.Q, 1st Airborne Division.



	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
5	2nd Pilot Sgt James Whitehead	3528646	Dunkinfield, Lancashire, UK D Sqdn, GPR
6	2/Lt Janusz Szegda	OP1510	Newport, Dundee, Scotland Polish liaison officer, 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade
7	Sgt Klaas Luitwieler	1587	Dutch commando/No.2 Dutch Troop, No.10 Inter-Allied Command/van der Baanstraat, Zaanstad, Holland
8	L/Cpl K. Barnard	T/191551	Godstone, Surrey, UK RASC
9	Dvr William Eggleton	14524207	Padworth, Reading, UK RASC

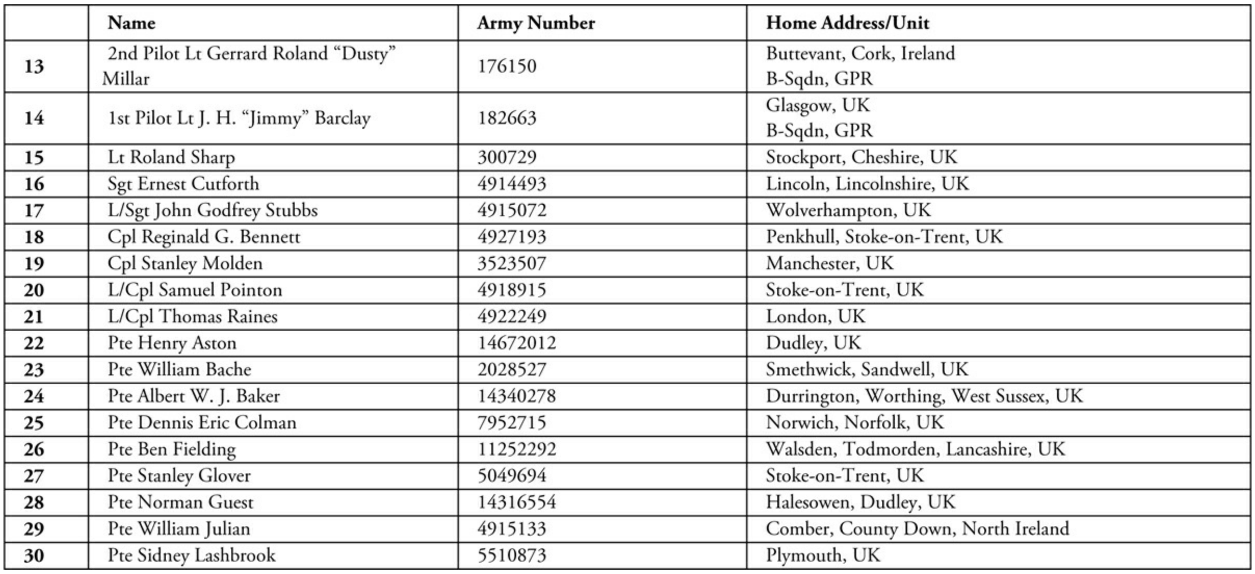
September 17: American C-47 Skytrain 43-16033 of 434TCG/72TCS, crashed at Oostelbeers.



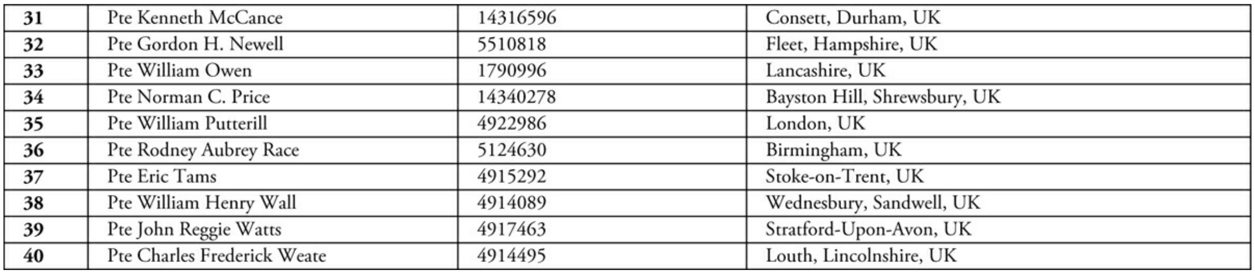
	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
10	Co-pilot 2/Lt William F. Baker	0.2059885	Florence, Alabama, USA
11	T/Sgt Cristopher S. Domitrovich	36054843	Granite City, Illinois, USA
12	S/Sgt Rollin Duane Ellis	16088020	Benton Harbor, Michigan, USA

September 17: British Horsa glider Chalk Number 298 at De Moer.

Onboard: No.12 Platoon, B-Company, 2nd Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment.



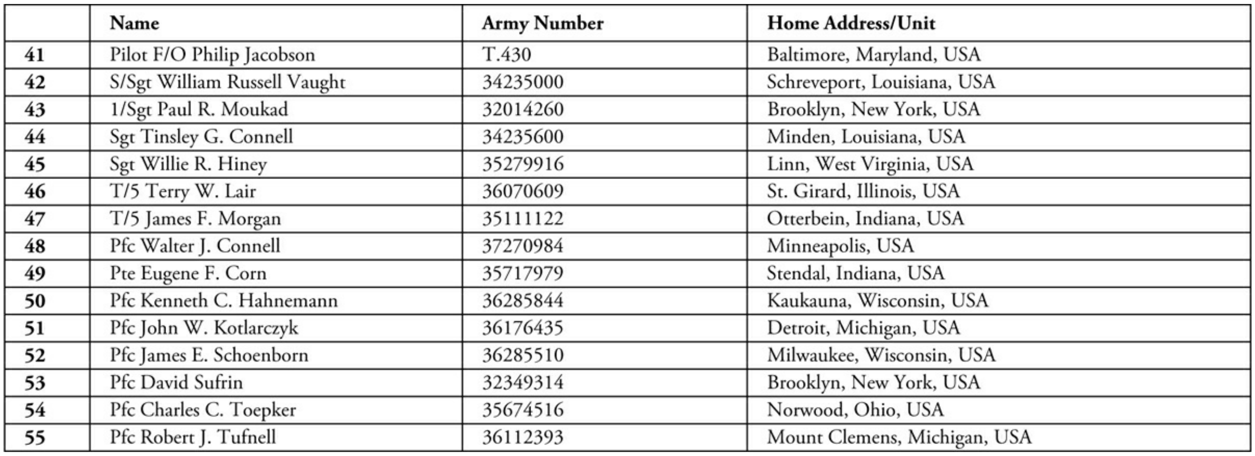
	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
13	2nd Pilot Lt Gerrard Roland "Dusty" Millar	176150	Buttevant, Cork, Ireland B-Sqdn, GPR
14	1st Pilot Lt J. H. "Jimmy" Barclay	182663	Glasgow, UK B-Sqdn, GPR
15	Lt Roland Sharp	300729	Stockport, Cheshire, UK
16	Sgt Ernest Cutforth	4914493	Lincoln, Lincolnshire, UK
17	L/Sgt John Godfrey Stubbs	4915072	Wolverhampton, UK
18	Cpl Reginald G. Bennett	4927193	Penkhull, Stoke-on-Trent, UK
19	Cpl Stanley Molden	3523507	Manchester, UK
20	L/Cpl Samuel Pointon	4918915	Stoke-on-Trent, UK
21	L/Cpl Thomas Raines	4922249	London, UK
22	Pte Henry Aston	14672012	Dudley, UK
23	Pte William Bache	2028527	Smethwick, Sandwell, UK
24	Pte Albert W. J. Baker	14340278	Durrington, Worthing, West Sussex, UK
25	Pte Dennis Eric Colman	7952715	Norwich, Norfolk, UK
26	Pte Ben Fielding	11252292	Walsden, Todmorden, Lancashire, UK
27	Pte Stanley Glover	5049694	Stoke-on-Trent, UK
28	Pte Norman Guest	14316554	Halesowen, Dudley, UK
29	Pte William Julian	4915133	Comber, County Down, North Ireland
30	Pte Sidney Lashbrook	5510873	Plymouth, UK



31	Pte Kenneth McCance	14316596	Consett, Durham, UK
32	Pte Gordon H. Newell	5510818	Fleet, Hampshire, UK
33	Pte William Owen	1790996	Lancashire, UK
34	Pte Norman C. Price	14340278	Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, UK
35	Pte William Putterill	4922986	London, UK
36	Pte Rodney Aubrey Race	5124630	Birmingham, UK
37	Pte Eric Tams	4915292	Stoke-on-Trent, UK
38	Pte William Henry Wall	4914089	Wednesbury, Sandwell, UK
39	Pte John Reggie Watts	4917463	Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK
40	Pte Charles Frederick Weate	4914495	Louth, Lincolnshire, UK

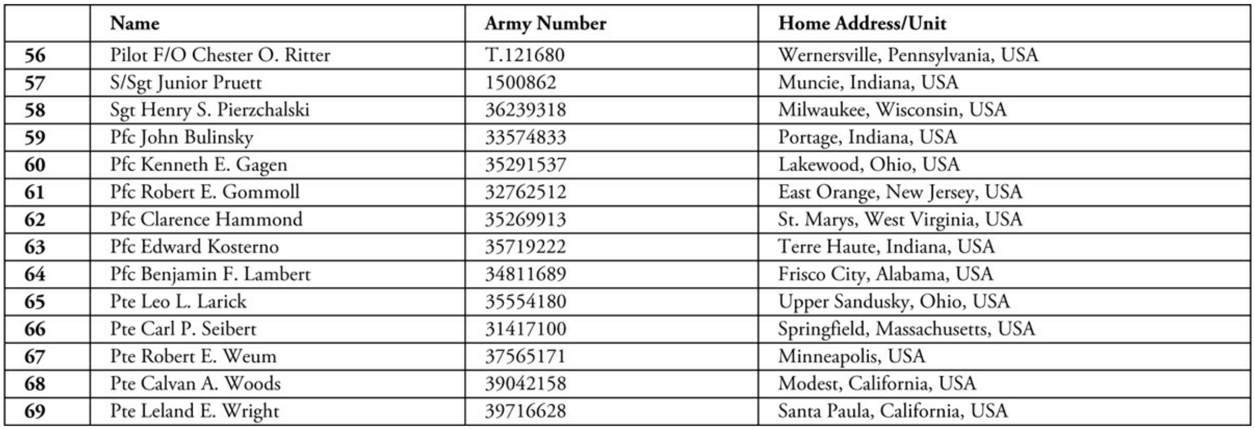
September 18: American Waco glider Chalk Number 28A of 434TCG/72TCS, De Brand/Gommelsestraat, west of hamlet of Zandkant.

Onboard: HQ/Coy, 1st Battalion, 401 Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.



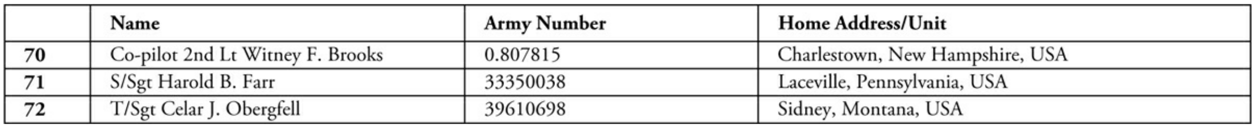
	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
41	Pilot F/O Philip Jacobson	T.430	Baltimore, Maryland, USA
42	S/Sgt William Russell Vaught	34235000	Schreveport, Louisiana, USA
43	1/Sgt Paul R. Moukad	32014260	Brooklyn, New York, USA
44	Sgt Tinsley G. Connell	34235600	Minden, Louisiana, USA
45	Sgt Willie R. Hiney	35279916	Linn, West Virginia, USA
46	T/5 Terry W. Lair	36070609	St. Girard, Illinois, USA
47	T/5 James F. Morgan	35111122	Otterbein, Indiana, USA
48	Pfc Walter J. Connell	37270984	Minneapolis, USA
49	Pte Eugene F. Corn	35717979	Stendal, Indiana, USA
50	Pfc Kenneth C. Hahnemann	36285844	Kaukauna, Wisconsin, USA
51	Pfc John W. Kotlarczyk	36176435	Detroit, Michigan, USA
52	Pfc James E. Schoenborn	36285510	Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
53	Pfc David Sufrin	32349314	Brooklyn, New York, USA
54	Pfc Charles C. Toepker	35674516	Norwood, Ohio, USA
55	Pfc Robert J. Tufnell	36112393	Mount Clemens, Michigan, USA

September 18: American Waco glider of 436TCG/79TCS Bergenshuizen/Hoevensestraat, 2 miles (3.5km) northwest of Esch.
Onboard: F-Company, 327 Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.



	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
56	Pilot F/O Chester O. Ritter	T.121680	Wernersville, Pennsylvania, USA
57	S/Sgt Junior Pruett	1500862	Muncie, Indiana, USA
58	Sgt Henry S. Pierzchalski	36239318	Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
59	Pfc John Bulinsky	33574833	Portage, Indiana, USA
60	Pfc Kenneth E. Gagen	35291537	Lakewood, Ohio, USA
61	Pfc Robert E. Gommoll	32762512	East Orange, New Jersey, USA
62	Pfc Clarence Hammond	35269913	St. Marys, West Virginia, USA
63	Pfc Edward Kosterno	35719222	Terre Haute, Indiana, USA
64	Pfc Benjamin F. Lambert	34811689	Frisco City, Alabama, USA
65	Pte Leo L. Larick	35554180	Upper Sandusky, Ohio, USA
66	Pte Carl P. Seibert	31417100	Springfield, Massachusetts, USA
67	Pte Robert E. Weum	37565171	Minneapolis, USA
68	Pte Calvan A. Woods	39042158	Modest, California, USA
69	Pte Leland E. Wright	39716628	Santa Paula, California, USA

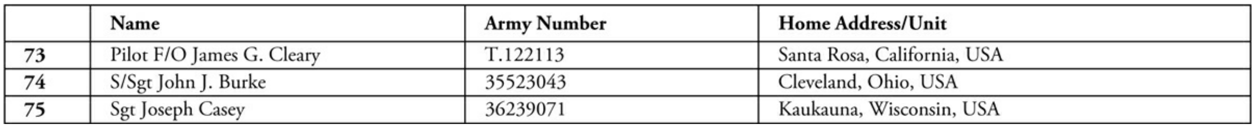
September 18: American C-47 Skytrain 42-100556 of 436TCG/81TCS, crashed on Venrode estate, 2 miles (3.5km) east of Esch.



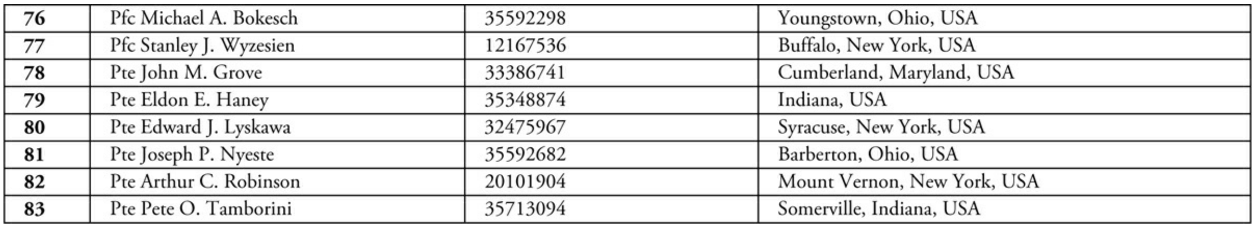
	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
70	Co-pilot 2nd Lt Witney F. Brooks	0.807815	Charlestown, New Hampshire, USA
71	S/Sgt Harold B. Farr	33350038	Laceville, Pennsylvania, USA
72	T/Sgt Celar J. Obergfell	39610698	Sidney, Montana, USA

September 19: American Waco glider 42-56174 of 442TCG/304TCS, Scheepersdijk/Berghuizenseweg, 1½ miles (2.5km) northwest of Esch.
Onboard: HQ/Coy, 1st Battalion, 327 Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st

Airborne Division.

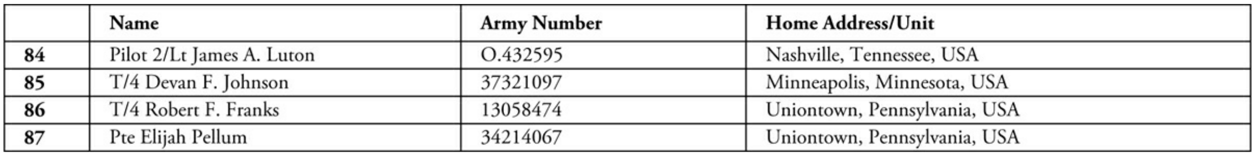


	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
73	Pilot F/O James G. Cleary	T.122113	Santa Rosa, California, USA
74	S/Sgt John J. Burke	35523043	Cleveland, Ohio, USA
75	Sgt Joseph Casey	36239071	Kaukauna, Wisconsin, USA



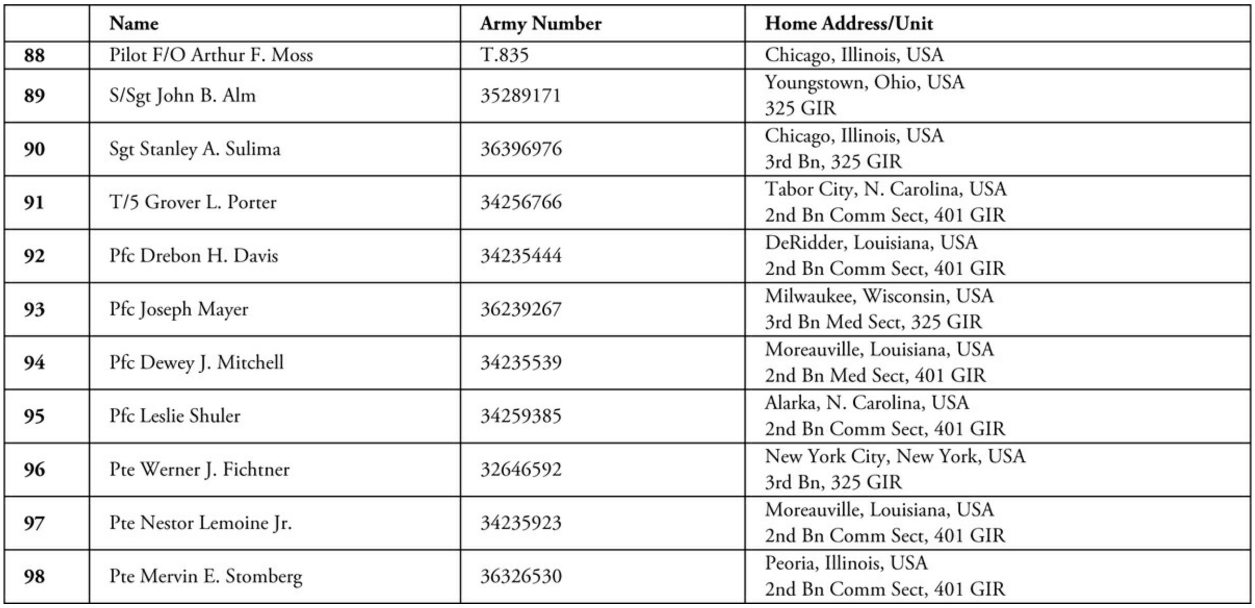
76	Pfc Michael A. Bokesch	35592298	Youngstown, Ohio, USA
77	Pfc Stanley J. Wyzesien	12167536	Buffalo, New York, USA
78	Pte John M. Grove	33386741	Cumberland, Maryland, USA
79	Pte Eldon E. Haney	35348874	Indiana, USA
80	Pte Edward J. Lyskawa	32475967	Syracuse, New York, USA
81	Pte Joseph P. Nyeste	35592682	Barberton, Ohio, USA
82	Pte Arthur C. Robinson	20101904	Mount Vernon, New York, USA
83	Pte Pete O. Tamborini	35713094	Somerville, Indiana, USA

September 19: American Waco glider of 442TCG/303TCS, Hamlet of Nergena, just under 2 miles (3km) northwest of Boxtel.
Onboard: HQ/Coy, 327 Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.



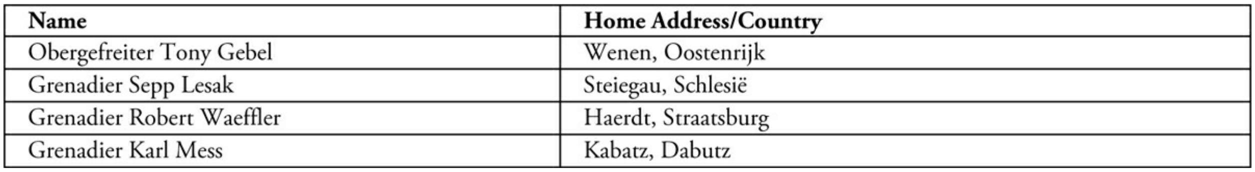
	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
84	Pilot 2/Lt James A. Luton	O.432595	Nashville, Tennessee, USA
85	T/4 Devan F. Johnson	37321097	Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
86	T/4 Robert F. Franks	13058474	Uniontown, Pennsylvania, USA
87	Pte Elijah Pellum	34214067	Uniontown, Pennsylvania, USA

September 23: American Waco glider Chalk Number 21B of 441TCG/301TCS, 3.75 miles (6km) south of Boxtel, Kinderbos.
Onboard: 2nd Battalion, 401 Glider Infantry Regiment and 3rd Battalion, 325 Glider Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division.

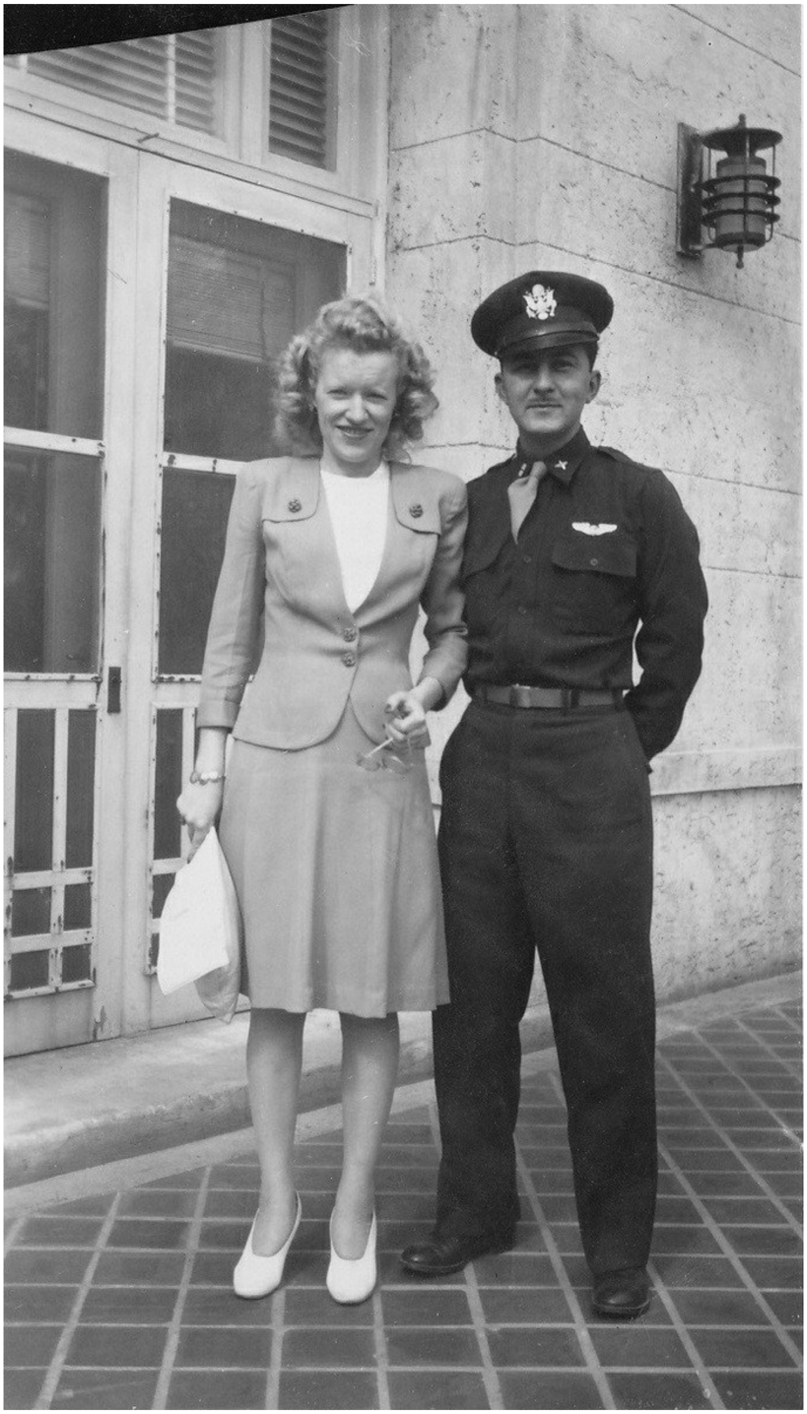


	Name	Army Number	Home Address/Unit
88	Pilot F/O Arthur F. Moss	T.835	Chicago, Illinois, USA
89	S/Sgt John B. Alm	35289171	Youngstown, Ohio, USA 325 GIR
90	Sgt Stanley A. Sulima	36396976	Chicago, Illinois, USA 3rd Bn, 325 GIR
91	T/5 Grover L. Porter	34256766	Tabor City, N. Carolina, USA 2nd Bn Comm Sect, 401 GIR
92	Pfc Drebon H. Davis	34235444	DeRidder, Louisiana, USA 2nd Bn Comm Sect, 401 GIR
93	Pfc Joseph Mayer	36239267	Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA 3rd Bn Med Sect, 325 GIR
94	Pfc Dewey J. Mitchell	34235539	Moreauville, Louisiana, USA 2nd Bn Med Sect, 401 GIR
95	Pfc Leslie Shuler	34259385	Alarka, N. Carolina, USA 2nd Bn Comm Sect, 401 GIR
96	Pte Werner J. Fichtner	32646592	New York City, New York, USA 3rd Bn, 325 GIR
97	Pte Nestor Lemoine Jr.	34235923	Moreauville, Louisiana, USA 2nd Bn Comm Sect, 401 GIR
98	Pte Mervin E. Stomberg	36326530	Peoria, Illinois, USA 2nd Bn Comm Sect, 401 GIR

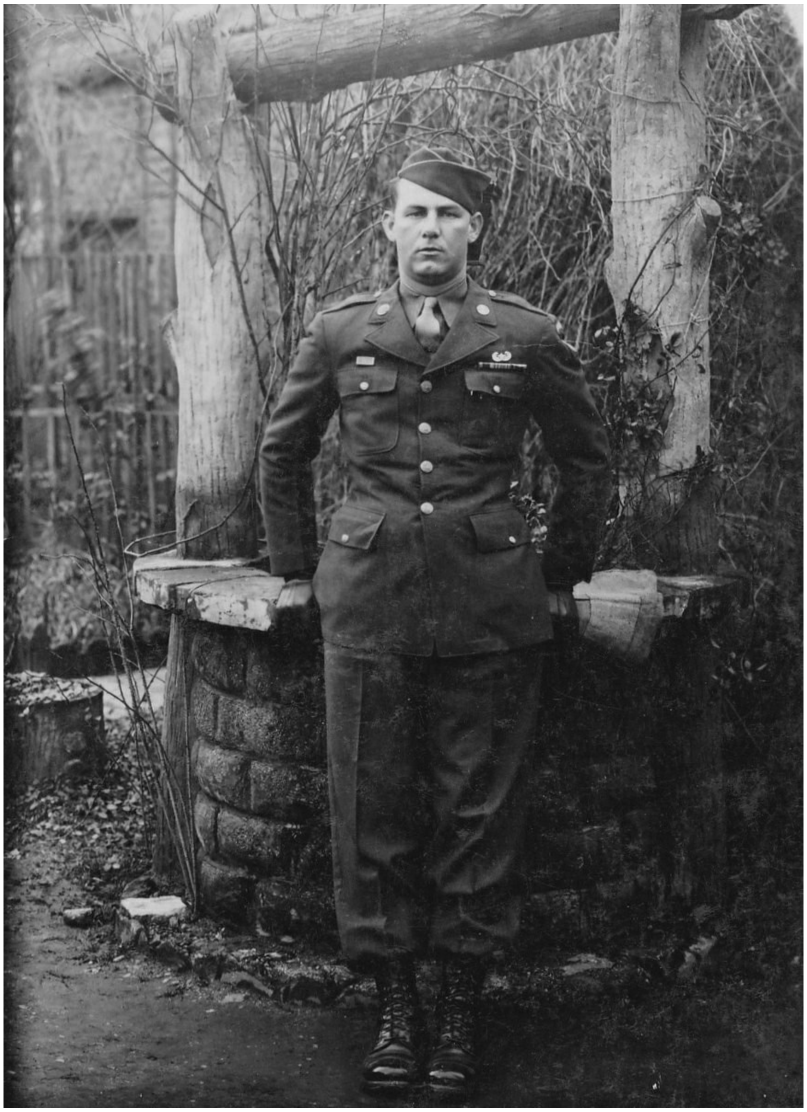
The German deserters that Cees van Leeuwen brought to the Kampina with Marinus Verhagen and Roel Dekker in the night of October 21/22 October.



Name	Home Address/Country
Obergefreiter Tony Gebel	Wenen, Oostenrijk
Grenadier Sepp Lesak	Steiegau, Schlesië
Grenadier Robert Waeffler	Haerdt, Straatsburg
Grenadier Karl Mess	Kabatz, Dabutz

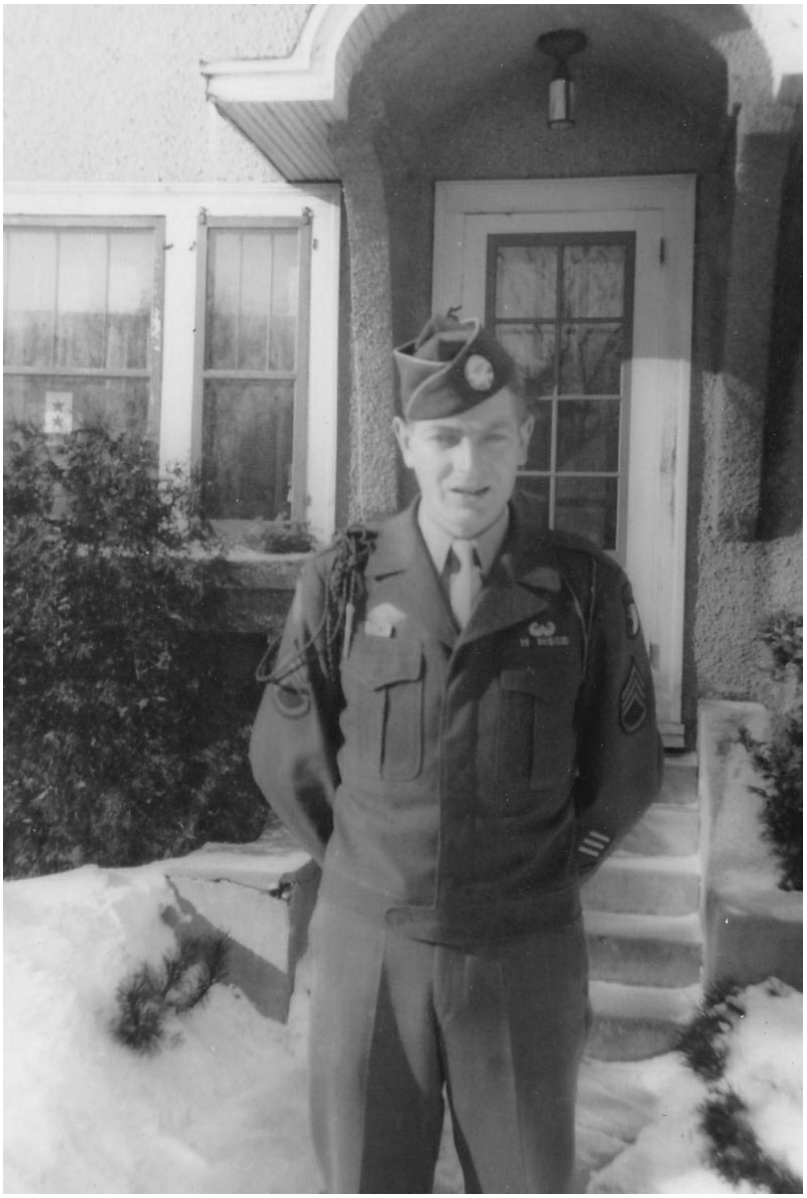


F/O Chester O. Ritter. (Dekker family)

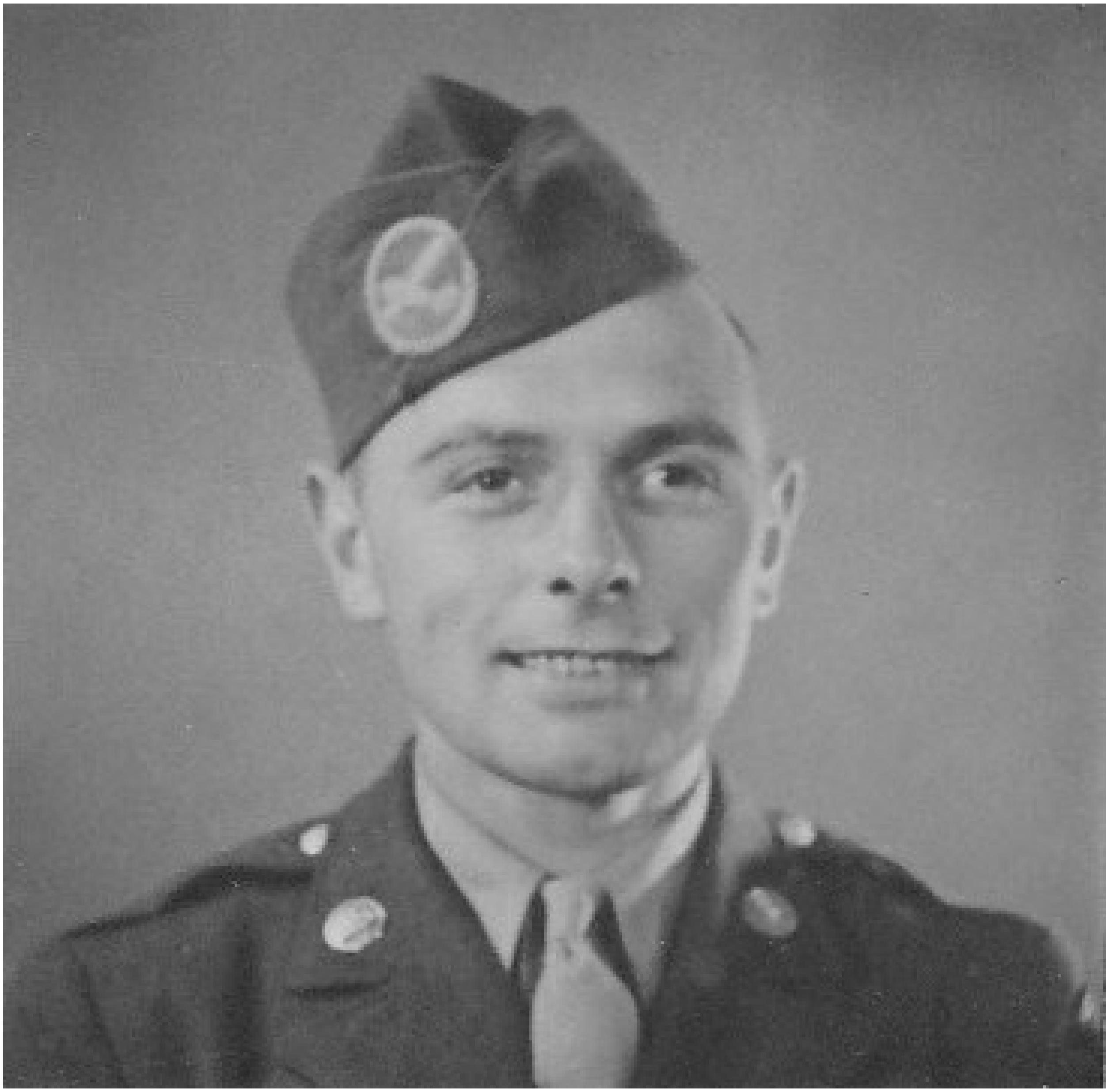


Pte Nestor Lemoine Jr. (Dekker family)

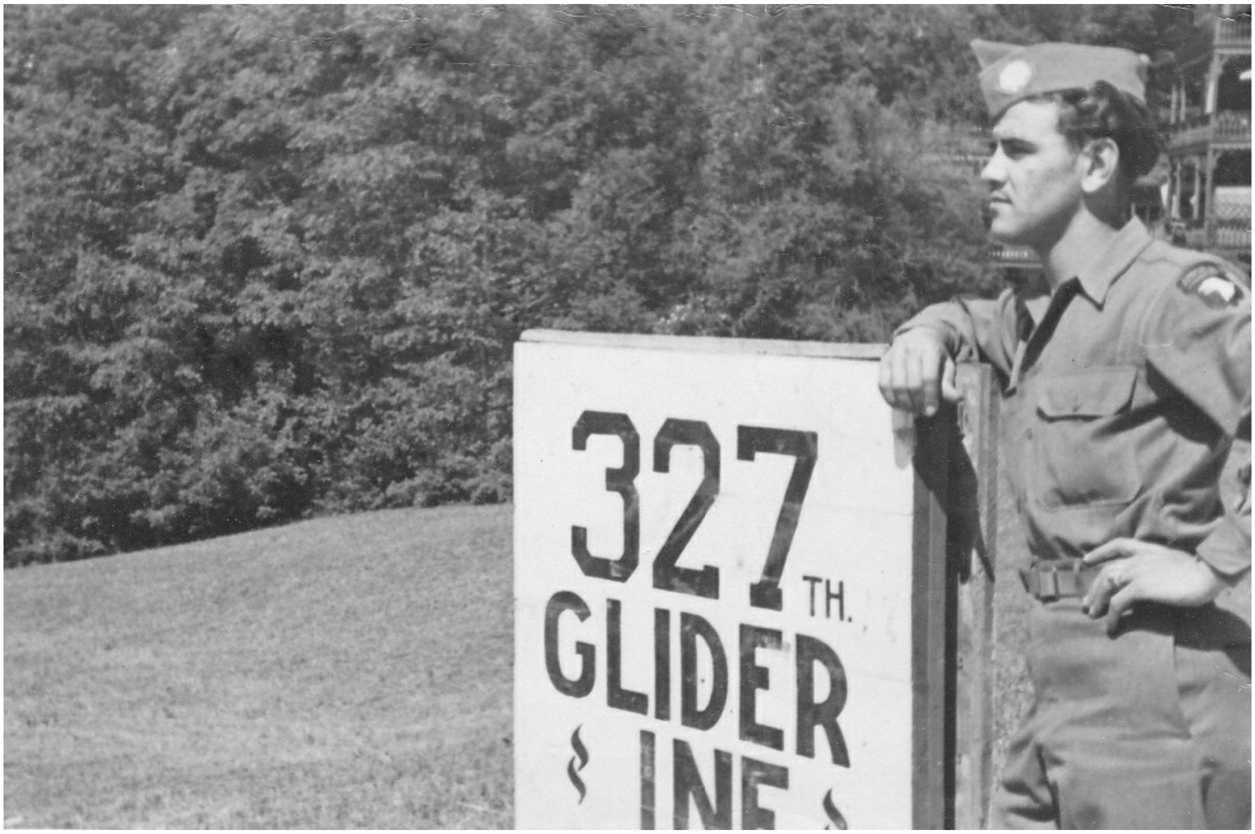
Pte Carl P. Seibert. (Dekker family)



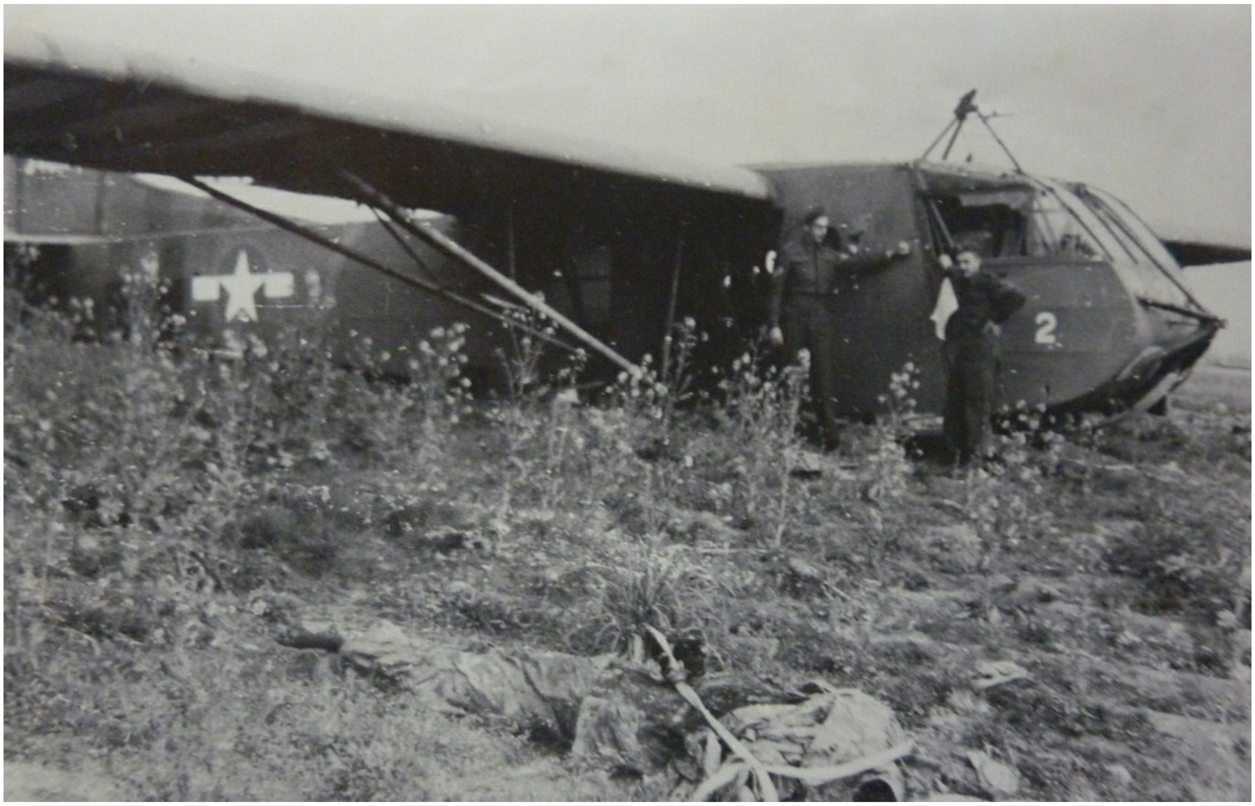
T/4 Devan F. Johnson. (Dekker family)



Pte Joseph P. Nyeste. (Dekker family)


327 TH.
GLIDER
INF

Pfc Michael A. Bokesch. (Dekker family)



In the days after the liberation two British soldiers pose in front of one of the American Waco gliders that landed prematurely near Boxtel. (G. Segers)

Appendix 2: Boxtel’s Resistance

Men and women of the Dutch resistance and their associates from Boxtel and surroundings, as far as could be identified by the author

Principal members of the support/resistance of Boxtel

Klaas Dekker, Boxtel
Roel Dekker, Boxtel
Sjef de Jong, police officer, Boxtel
Cees van Leeuwen, Esch
Grard van der Meijden, Boxtel
Gabriël Sauer, Dordrecht
Marinus Verhagen, Esch

Principal support to the resistance of Boxtel

H.L.A. de Beer, Oirschot
Wim Engels, N-Br
Willem de Groot, farmer, Lennisheuvel, Boxtel
Aalt van den Ham, forester, Kampina
J. van den Heuvel-Maas, Kinderbos, Boxtel
Louis Katan, Rotterdam
Leo Kurtsjens, farmer, Lennisheuvel, Boxtel
Jan Kwant, Boxtel
Wim Meijer, forester, Kampina
Van der Meyden, farmer, Tongeren, Boxtel
Wim Oerlemans, Udenhout
Father Janus Optatus, Udenhout
A.E. Schuurmans, police officer, Boxtel
Chaplain Sleegers, Oisterwijk

Helpers of the crew from crashed C-47 43-16033 at Oostelbeers

Johan Hubacher, Oirschot
Willem Nooijen, Oirschot
Meyer, Straten, Oirschot

Louis Termeer, Oirschot
Fam Vlemminx, Oirschot

Those who helped support the food supply efforts

Van Beckhoven, baker, Oisterwijk
Van Hal family, Boxtel
Jan van Houtem, Kleiner Liempde, Boxtel
Van Iersel (supplier of butter)
De Jong family, Boxtel
Jan de Jong, Boxtel
Theo Kurstjens, Lennisheuvel, Boxtel
Wout van de Laar, baker, Boxtel
Albert van Leeuwen, Esch
Fridus van Leeuwen, Esch
Nicolaas van Leeuwen, Esch
P.J. Smits, Boxtel

Individuals and families who offered support and loyalty

Family of J. van Antwerpen, Boxtel
Family of J. de Bie, Boxtel
Ed de Bruin, Boxtel
Sister Christinette, Ziekenhuis Boxtel
Wim Coppens, Vught
Truus Dekker, Boxtel
Zus Dekker, Boxtel
Wim Engels, Boxtel
Family of F. van Erp, Boxtel
Mayor Francisse, Boxtel
De Groot family, Lennisheuvel, Boxtel
Sjaan van Heesch-van Boxtel, Boxtel
Doctor Hoek, Boxtel
Jo and Cor van Hooff, Boxtel
Family of Sjef de Jong, Boxtel
Jan Klijberg, Moergestel
Konings family, Esch

Jan vd Laar, Boxtel
Door van der Meijden, Boxtel
Family of F vd Meijden, Boxtel
Schut Family, Balsvoort, Oisterwijk
Peter Smits, Boxtel
Cris Verwey, Boxtel
Van Zeeland-Hazenberg, Boxtel

Appendix 3: Drunen’s Resistance

Men and women of the Dutch resistance and their associates from Drunen and surroundings, as far as could be identified by the author

Principal members of the support/resistance Drunen

David Elshout, Drunen
Leo Elshout, Drunen
Henk Stooter, Elshout
Ad Veltman, Elshout

Principal support to the resistance of Drunen

Dr G.C. Akkermans, Drunen
Frans Elshout, Drunen
H. Glaudemans, ’s-Hertogenbosch
Jan van Kempen, the Pesterd
Antoinette Klerks, Elshout
Cor Klerks, Elshout
H. Rumling, Helvoirt
C. van Tooren, Drunen
Henriëtte Veltman-Klerks, Elshout
Jan Veltman, Drunen
Godfridus Visser, Drunen
Brothers of the Sint Norbertus Institution, Elshout: Father Superior Gilbertus Rusman, Elshout; Rector van Zeeland, Elshout
Dominican Fathers, Drunen: Brother Clemens; Brother Hendrik Gielkens; Father Nol Meijers; Father Willem Schooneman; Father
Sjef Verschure
Chaplain Simons, Drunen
Members of the resistance group André: Adriaan Kuysten, Sprang-Capelle; Jan Mallens, Kaatsheuvel; A. Smit, Mayor, Sprang-Capelle

Those who offered general assistance

Theo van Delft, Drunen
Piet Elshout, Drunen

Brother Aloises Hoogervorst, Elshout
Van Kempen family, the Pesterd
Tiny Metsemakers, Helvoirt
Father Schelentroot, Helvoirt
Frans Spierings, Elshout
Van Wagenberg, Heusden
Vin Weijers, Waalwijk
Sint Norbertus Institution, Elshout: Brother Isfridus Meert
Sint Nicolaas hospital, Sisters of J.M.J Waalwijk: Sister Superior Irmengard; Sister Laetitia

After the war a number of the listed Dutch resistance men and women and their associates were decorated by the British, American, and Dutch governments for their actions and contribution for the care and hiding of British and American servicemen.
These decorations were amongst others:
War Commemorative Cross (NL)
Resistance Memorial Cross 1940–1945 (NL)
Medal of Freedom (USA)
Kings Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom (UK)

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The Netherlands' Cadastre

US Air Force, USA

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